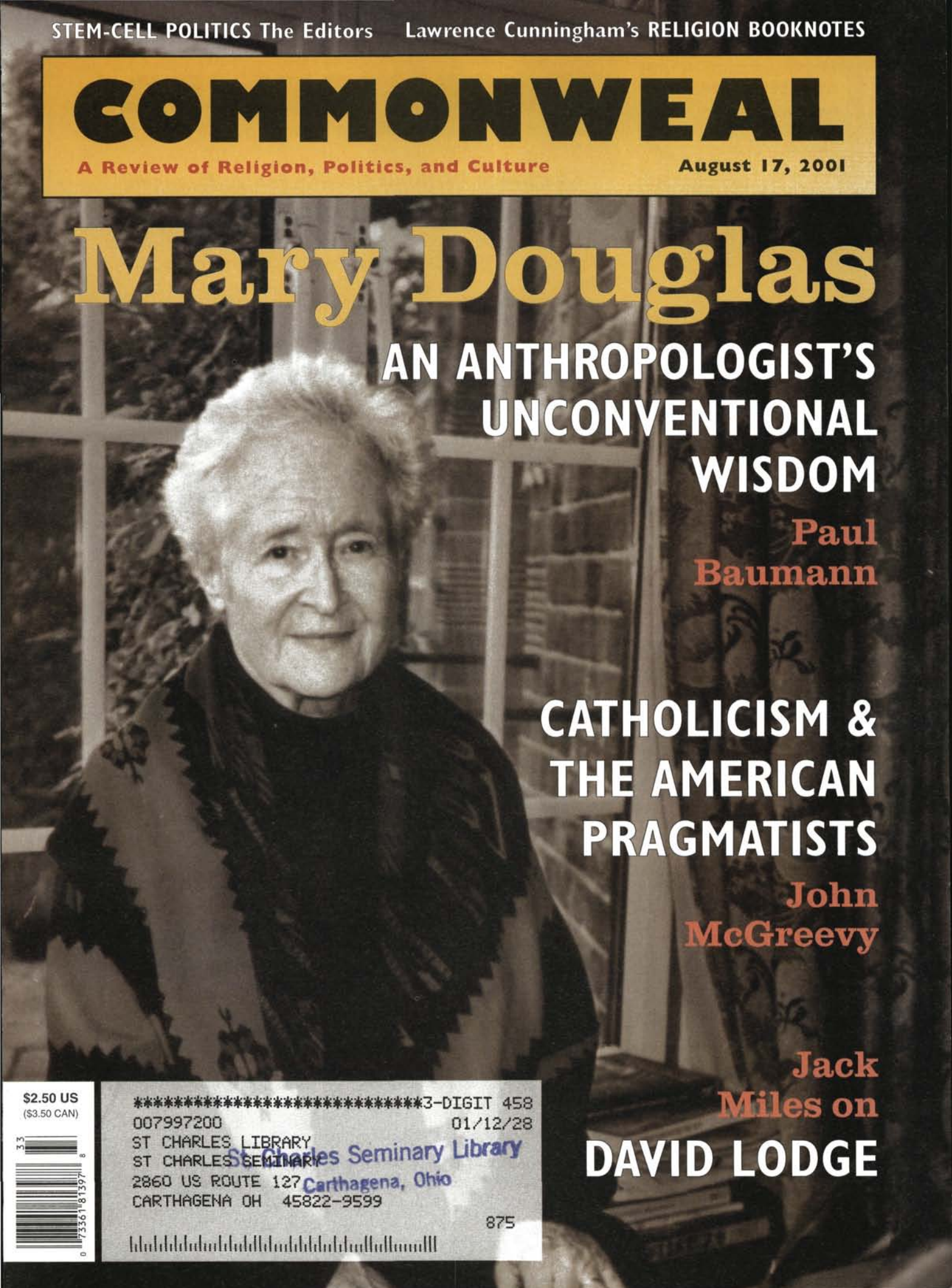
STEM-CELL POLITICS The Editors Lawrence Cunningham's RELIGION BOOKNOTES

COMMONWEAL

A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture

August 17, 2001



Mary Douglas

AN ANTHROPOLOGIST'S UNCONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Paul Baumann

CATHOLICISM & THE AMERICAN PRAGMATISTS

John McGreevy

Jack Miles on

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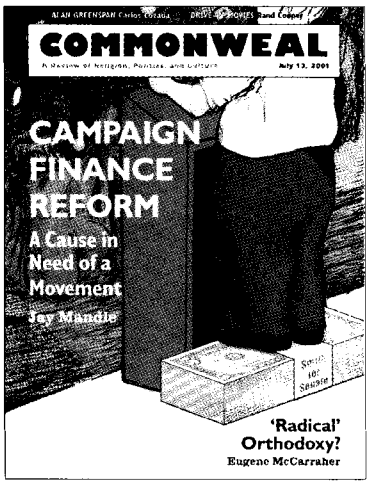

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COMMONWEAL

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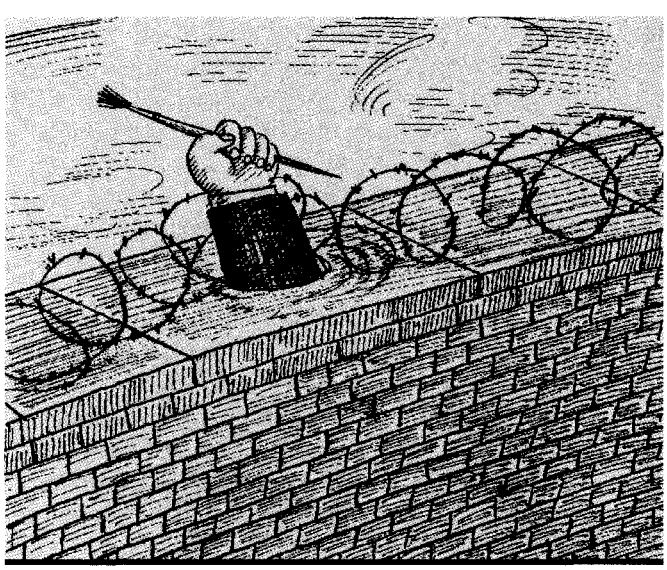

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To the Editors

Priests & prayer

I appreciated John Garvey's "Sinning and Sorrowing" (July 13). His hope that priests be serious about living a life grounded in prayer as a prerequisite to being a good confessor is admirable, but less and less likely, as the dearth of clergy leaves them little time for much else besides liturgy and business administration. The yearly parish appreciation dinner affords me the opportunity to chat with my pastor. Each year I ask, "Jack, are you getting quiet time for yourself?"

"No, Eileen, but keep asking."

EILEEN YOUNG
Swampscott, Mass.

How radical?

Eugene McCarraher's review of "radical orthodoxy" ("Theology at the Barricades," July 13) raises in a temperate yet challenging way the issue for Catholics in America: As political, or at least social, creatures, how do we live out the gospel call? Are we (merely) to be good citizens living in our pluralist, secular, or if McCarraher prefers, perverse system? Or are we to live "as if" the Kingdom of God had come?

McCarraher criticizes radical orthodoxy on a number of important points, but his claim that electoral politics is the "only large-scale and effective means we currently have to mitigate" the damaging conditions of contemporary American life misses the mark.

First, there really is a reasonable basis for a substantial withdrawal from governmental and political activities, especially lawyering (recall, "woe unto you, lawyers"). And we as believers should not be too quick to adopt efficiency as a measure of goodness.

For those less inclined to biblical literalism and more accepting of American pragmatism, and therefore efficiency, look at the alternative strategy of the European dissidents of Poland and elsewhere in the 1970s and '80s. They lived out an "antipolitics" which renounced any claim to governmental authority. They lived "as if" they were free.

That said, the issues and arguments of Milbank and the others are too important to be disposed of in a brief review. Readers deserve your help in better understanding the strengths and weaknesses of "radical orthodoxy."

WALTER J. KENDALL III
Chicago, Ill.

Too much disdain

I was happy to see Eugene McCarraher back on your pages, and hope he returns often. He seems to me one of the most thoughtful and distinctive voices in a younger generation of American Catholic intellectuals. I agree entirely both with his praise for "radical orthodoxy" and his well-focused and characteristically blunt criticisms. My one hesitation is about his tendency to leave too many potential allies bloody and abandoned on the battlefield. With due respect, I don't agree that Milbank "demonstrates" that Gustavo Gutiérrez and others "do nothing more than swing a thurible around a totem of 'progress.'" We need a politics that builds coalitions and cultivates friendships. We can't sustain a redemptive social movement, pace *First Things*, based primarily on shared disdains.

ROBERT J. EGAN, S.J.
Spokane, Wash.

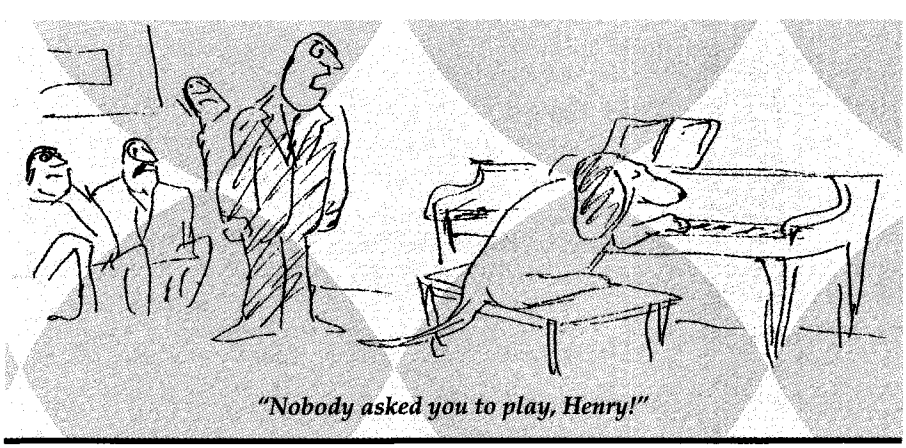
A correction

I was happy to see Michael Baxter, Robert Brimlow, and Michael Budde getting some of the attention that has thus far been lavished primarily on the British "founders" of radical orthodoxy [July 13]. One correction, however: the author of *Torture and Eucharist* is William Cavanaugh. Someone seems to have spliced Cavanaugh's theological DNA with mine—understandable, since both of us collaborate with the authors mentioned in the article, and we were once colleagues at the University of Saint Thomas. (We are also about the same height, and we both do excellent home repair.) But Cavanaugh deserves the credit, and accurate citation, for his fine book (which I hope your readers will buy and read).

The article calls for this new theological movement "to get into the world," but fails to mention the work of the Ekklesia Project (www.ekklesiaproject.org), an interdenominational group of scholars and church leaders founded in Chicago in 1999 to promote radical Christian discipleship and social engagement. Many of the scholars mentioned in your article are among our founding members, but the project involves pastors, lay church leaders, and social activists.

DAVID S. CUNNINGHAM
Evanston, Ill.

The writer is professor of theology and ethics at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary.



"Nobody asked you to play, Henry!"

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The stem-cell sell

"Ladies and Gentleman: Today Only: The Elixir of Life! We have in these nearly invisible, no-bigger-than-the-period-at-the-end-of-this-sentence embryos the secret to long life and perfect health. These tiny cells—they call 'em blastocysts back in the lab—will cure the aches and pains, the ills of humankind. Neurologically degenerative conditions like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, gone like smallpox! Autoimmune diseases like lupus and rheumatoid arthritis, cured on diagnosis! The end of cancer! The end of diabetes as we know it! And, Ladies and Gentlemen, these cells, as miniscule as they appear today, will someday provide replacement parts for every nook and cranny of the human body, from hearts to hamstrings.

"You ask how anything so small could provide us with the gift of virtual immortality? Ladies and Gentlemen, give us your dollars and we will give you the answer."

Instructive, isn't it, how much scientists clamoring for federal funds sound like that quintessential American huckster, the snake-oil salesman?

We have heard this spiel before. In 1992, Congress held hearings on transplanting fetal brain cells, much like the hearings we saw in mid-July on embryonic stem cells. Suffering humanity, especially children, are exhibited to move the hearts of congressmen who wouldn't dare say "no" to Little Nell. Back in '92, proponents argued that fetal brain cells were the cure for Parkinson's and for most of the diseases and disabilities that today they say stem cells will remedy. In fact, transplanted fetal brain cells have turned out to be, well—snake oil. Congress approved, and fetal brain cells were duly injected into the brains of Parkinson's sufferers. The treatment did not work. More serious, it made the conditions of some 15 percent of patients far worse, and their standard medications less effective than they had been before the implantation.

This is not proof that fetal cells, stems cells, or cloned cells won't eventually do much that scientists have promised. But, as yet, there is meager evidence that they will. At the same time, tentative research results suggest that *adult* stem cells may offer respite from certain cancers, some injuries, and some chronic illnesses while avoiding the potential biological problems expected with embryo stem cells, namely tumors and transplant rejection.

President George W. Bush is being asked to approve National Institute of Health guidelines that would permit federal funding of research on embryonic stem cells. These forty cell-embryos are the product of in vitro fertilization procedures in which sperm and egg are joined in a "test tube." Some of these embryos will be implanted in a woman's uterus, while others are frozen and stored. When couples no longer need or want them, the embryos are usually discarded. It is the stem cells from these discarded embryos that researchers are eager to get into their petri dishes for experimentation supported by federal funds. In fact, such research has been going on in private labs without benefit of federal funds, and so far without much progress. To date, researchers are said to have developed approximately six stem-cell lines, that is, they have replicated an original stem cell in six instances. It is these stem-cell lines that would be used for research if Bush approves the NIH guidelines.

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That the embryos are nascent human life, which must be destroyed in order to extract the stem cells, is, of course, a controversial matter, raising all the arguments and passions that surround the abortion issue. A human life has begun. But other profound questions are at stake; and the abortion cudgel tends to obscure them.

It is true these embryos are not human persons (which is why some prolife senators and congressmen have come out in favor of federal funding for stem-cell research). But they are human life—after all, those few that survive the arduous implantation and gestation process would become human beings, not frogs. It is the fact of their humanness not their stage of development that should raise the most profound skepticism about the ultimate goal of embryo stem-cell research. Today we are promised cures from debilitating or fatal diseases; tomorrow replacement organs; and the day after custom-designed progeny. By then we will be well on the road to the brave new world of control and standardization of human reproduction. This is a process of selection that can only destroy the fragile hold we humans have on a sense of our own dignity and singularity.

Proponents of stem-cell research argue that since these embryos will be discarded anyway, we should used them for the benefit of the living who are suffering now. On the contrary, embryos should not be used in this way for the same reason that we would not cannibalize the heart, kidney, liver, or corneas of a unconscious person for transplantation purposes. In other words, as a matter of public policy, we would not sacrifice the life and/or dignity of one human, no matter its state of being or state of development, for the benefit of another.

If we do not draw a line now respecting human life in these embryos, the pressures on the president and Congress from researchers, investors, and the representatives of the ill and dying guarantee that no line will be drawn at all. Before adjourning, the House tried to draw one significant line by banning human cloning, but the Senate is unlikely to follow its lead when they return in September. In the meantime, the president should say no to the NIH guidelines, and instead work with Congress to appropriate a modest level of federal funding to support research on adult stem cells. This research has shown real potential and is being carried out now without raising the moral, legal, and biological problems of embryonic stem cells.

"Along about two-fifteen, it should have a mid-life crisis."

ET CETERA

Before there was a Vatican ■ Before there were curial congregations, there were various authorities. There were monastic communities. There were Benedictines. Two recent events remind us of the importance of both the traditional understandings of authority and the spiritual wisdom required to exercise them in today's church.

■ The first event is the decision of Sister Christine Vladimiroff, O.S.B., prioress of the Erie Benedictines, to refuse an order from the Vatican's Congregation for the Consecrated Life to prohibit Sister Joan Chittister, a member of her community, from participating in the Women's Ordination Worldwide Conference in Dublin, Ireland, at the end of June.

In a statement defending her decision and that of the community, the prioress wrote: "After much deliberation and prayer, I concluded that I would decline the request of the Vatican. It is out of the Benedictine, or monastic, tradition of obedience that I formed my decision. There is a fundamental difference in the understanding of obedience in the monastic tradition and that which is being used by the Vatican to exert power and control and prompt a false sense of unity inspired by fear. Benedictine authority and obedience are achieved through dialogue between a community member and her prioress in a spirit of co-responsibility. The role of the prioress in a Benedictine community is to be a guide in the seeking of God. While lived in community, it is the individual member who does the seeking.

"Sister Joan Chittister, who has lived the monastic life with faith and fidelity for fifty years, must make her own decision based on her sense of church, her monastic profession, and her own personal integrity. I cannot be used by the Vatican to deliver an order of silencing...."

■ The second event is the decision of Archbishop Rembert Weakland, O.S.B., to proceed with the renovation of Milwaukee's Saint John's Cathedral, despite the efforts of Cardinal Jorge Medina of the Congregation for Worship to stop it. The story has been much in the news and can be found at www.jsonline.com. In a four-page letter to pastors, deacons, and parish directors of the archdiocese, Weakland wrote the following on July 5: "I insist unequivocally that Cardinal Medina of the Congregation for Worship has not proven that I broke any liturgical norms or canons in making the decisions that were rightfully mine to make as the local bishop of this church. I stand by that statement...I must, for the good of the diocese, in this local church, defend the position that the right of the local bishop to make judgments in this diocese cannot be compromised over something as trivial as a matter of taste or opinion. I will defend my decisions as being not only liturgically correct, sound, and beneficial, but also as being my prerogative to make. I do so, not out of stubbornness, but because, at this particular moment of history, it is my obligation to insist on the rights and duties of a local bishop in the Catholic Church."

Amen.

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GOT RELIGION?

Click here

In keeping with *Commonweal*'s usual schedule, only one issue is published each month during July and August. The next issue will be dated September 14.

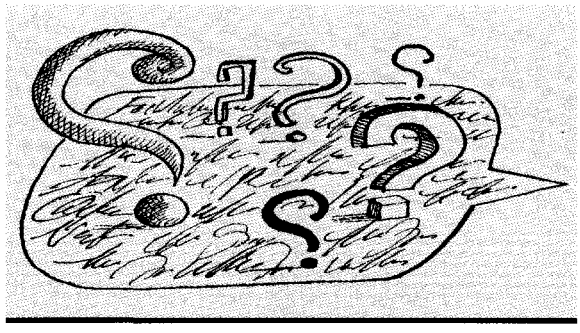
As any issue of *Cosmopolitan* shows, taking self-diagnostic quizzes is something of a national pastime. This fact is not lost on Beliefnet (www.beliefnet.com), the popular Web site that has quickly established itself as the center for religious and spiritual inquiry on the Internet. From its homepage, visitors can click links to everything from finding houses of worship (under "Spiritual Tools") to religious advice columns to analyses of morality and culture. One of the most popular links is "Quizzes."

While "How to Be a Better Lover" isn't among them, the quizzes offered are surprisingly eclectic. What's your spiritual type? (I'm a "spiritual dabbler," apparently.) Which Bible hero are you? (Turns out I'm Joseph [Mary's husband].) But the most entertaining is the Belief-O-Matic—"Answer 20 questions about your concept of God, the afterlife, human nature, and more, and the Belief-O-Matic will tell you what religion (if any) you practice." That's quite a claim, though it comes with a warning: "Belief-O-Matic assumes no legal liability for the ultimate fate of your soul."

The questions aren't easy. "What is the number and nature of the deity (God, gods, higher power)?" You have seven answers to choose from (one is "None of the above"). They vary, but aren't precise enough to win my allegiance. I select one of the "Only one God" choices—one comes with a corporeal body, one without; but I want both. I can't bring myself to click "None of the above," so *One incorporeal God it is*, I think to myself, and click accordingly.

Next question: "Are there human incarnation(s) of God (or of gods/goddesses)?" Easy enough for a Catholic. "One incarnation." *Click.* "What are the origins of the physical universe and life on earth?" Thank God this is multiple choice. "Not sure" seems the closest to my thoughts on the subject. So on to the next question: "What happens to humans after death?" Each of the eight possible answers is several sentences long. I rule out reincarnation. But the rest? They each include something I can't agree with. I skip this one and move on to, "Why is there terrible wrongdoing in the world?" Free will—there's something I can get into. *Click.*

Round two: Satan. I didn't see this one coming. "Satan's presence in the world results in much suffering." I assume that by "Satan" they mean a personal supernatural force of evil. That seems like a cop-out (What about human culpability?), so I click "Disagree." "Why is there so much suffering in the world? Choose all that apply." The requisite references to Adam and Eve follow, none of which I consider helpful or true. Nor do I think that suffering is an illusion. Karma doesn't do it for me, either, so I go for "None of the above" again (as if that isn't a cop-out, too).



Now come the heavier ideas—soteriology: How are we saved? In worship? Is it through an amorphous supreme being? Just one God, or a triune God? Is Baptism required? How does confession contribute to salvation? "Doing good works (deeds) and acting compassionately is:" Necessary, I say, clicking with certainty—the only certainty I've had throughout this survey.

Morality is next. Abortion: bad. *Click.* "Homosexual behavior should be regarded as immoral or out of harmony." Out of harmony with what? The natural order? Not being a fan of natural law theory, I click "Disagree." Should roles for men and women be "prescribed," the Belief-O-Matic asks? That's a little vague, but I go with "no."

I see that I have just four questions to answer before the Belief-O-Matic tells me what I believe. Quickly, I plow through them: Divorce: bad, but forgivable. Social betterment programs: Yes, good. Nonviolence? In general, yes, to be sought. In practice? I may be more of a situationalist than I previously thought. There's no compromise answer offered, so I skip it. Should prayer and spiritual healing exercises "be favored to the exclusion of conventional health treatment"? Big no there. And finally, just on the heels of President Bush's drill-to-China energy policy, "Revering nature or the environment should be fundamental." Wholeheartedly, I agree. That does it. Survey over. I click the "Submit" button (grinning at the religious implications) and nervously await my assessment.

The results? In ascending order are twenty-seven of the religions with which my beliefs most closely fit. At the top of the list: "Liberal Quaker (100 percent)." Who designed this quiz, Mother Angelica? I scan the list furtively for my religion, the one in which I was born, raised, and educated, past Unitarian Universalism, Sikhism, Baha'i, Liberal Protestant, Conservative Protestant, Reform Judaism, Orthodox Judaism, something they call New Thought (I have no idea), and finally, coming in at a staggeringly low number twenty, Roman Catholicism (59 percent)—a disturbing fourteen percentage points above Scientology. Where did I go wrong? Was it the sex? Satan? Must have been one of them. It usually is.

GRANT GALLICHO

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JO McGOWAN

LIES, DAMN LIES & STATISTICS

How India's census takers count

India's census, a once-a-decade undertaking, is a massive, door-to-door exercise because widespread illiteracy makes a mail-in form impractical. Conducted in February by enumerators culled from government schools, it was especially interesting to me because, after enormous effort, disability activists such as myself (I head a school for children with special needs) had succeeded in persuading the government to include handicapped people for the first time. While the census question was unsatisfactorily framed (only one disability was allowed per person; a child like my daughter, who falls into three of the given categories, had to be slotted into the one which we believed disabled her the most), those of us in the rehabilitation field thought it was better than nothing.

Like many other organizations around the country, my school, located in the North Indian city of Dehra Doon, waged an intensive awareness campaign in the weeks leading up to the census to encourage people with disabilities to see this as an opportunity finally to be counted. We hoped the census would eventually force the government to allocate funds more equitably. Focused as I was purely on the disability issue, it somehow never struck me that there were many other issues being addressed in the census, each with its own set of difficulties.

The day the census enumerator came to my home, my school colleagues and I were having a meeting in my living room. I excused myself and went to the garden to answer his questions. After putting down my husband Ravi's name as "Head of the Household" (I didn't even try to argue with him), the enumerator listed my name and those of our three children. For the next question, "Religion," without asking, he filled in "Hindu" for Ravi and was about to do the same for me and for the children.

"Wait a minute," I said. "How do you know what my religion is?"

"I can tell by your name," he said pityingly. (I had given my husband's name, thinking to avoid unnecessary explanations.)

"Well, you're wrong," I said. "I'm a Christian."

"How is that possible?" he said blankly. "Your name is Chopra."

"Look, I know what my religion is. I'm a Christian." He argued with me a bit more, delivering a short lecture on the importance of a Hindu wife respecting her husband, but finally marked me down as a Christian. It took me another five minutes to persuade him that the children, including my son, were also Christian, and it was clear the enumerator was not at all happy about it.

The next question regarded employment. He asked me what my husband did and wrote down my answer carefully. Then he began to fill in the blank for me as "housewife." "Wait a minute," I protested. "I'm the director of a school." It took another five minutes to convince him.

"Now language," he said, writing down Hindi as my husband's mother tongue.

"Hang on," I said. "His mother tongue isn't Hindi. It's Punjabi."

"No," said the enumerator emphatically. "Hindi is his mother tongue, Punjabi can be his second language."

"But Punjabi is not his second language; it's his mother tongue," I said just as emphatically.

"Not possible," he said, clearly offended. "We are all Indians; we all speak Hindi." By now, totally ignoring me, he recorded Hindi as my mother tongue, as well as that of the children.

"We certainly do not all speak Hindi," I said, struggling between amusement and anger, "and while it's very flattering of you to say that mine is so good that it could be considered my mother tongue, anyone with ears can tell that it isn't. Do you know what a mother tongue is?"

It was clear, however, that I was getting nowhere by arguing. I went inside and asked my colleagues to come out and join me. As it happened, one of them was from Calcutta and spoke Bengali as her mother tongue, another was from Kerala and spoke Malyalam, while the other two were British and spoke English. With such a multilingual group to contend with, the census man began to look a little less confident, but he remained still unconvinced. In tiny letters, he penciled in the answers I had given him, but I was quite sure they would be erased as soon as he left and be replaced with his more "accurate" ones.

By the time we finally got to the question I had been so eager to answer, the one about a family member with a dis-

"Maybe you should call before you drop in."

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ability, I was past caring what the man wrote. The whole exercise had revealed itself as a farce, and I felt a bit of a fool to have ever believed any usable statistics were to be obtained from it. If this were my experience, and I was educated and aware of the importance of the census, what would be the experience of citizens less confident or more intent on hiding things?

It makes for a funny story, and most of my friends were highly amused when I told them about it. But the more I think about it, the harder it is to laugh. India has more than twenty officially recognized languages, and while no one has yet come up with a way to resolve the problems that inevitably result from that, it's fairly certain that pretending there is only one is not it. And religion! It's all very well to believe—even fervently—in your own, but to let that lead you to the childlike certainty that everyone you meet agrees with you may be carrying things a bit too far. If only life really were as simple as my enumerator imagines it to be! □

John Rodden

'BARBED-WIRE SUNDAY'

The day Berlin was cut apart

The 300 watchtowers, the twenty-two bunkers, the guns, the border guards, the dogs, the death strip, Checkpoint Charlie—they're all gone now. Only 420 feet of the Berlin Wall remain—chiefly in the Bernauer Strasse in the city's Wedding district—as a tourist attraction, a memorial, and a sobering reminder. Once known as the "death strip," the Bernauer Strasse is where East Germans made dramatic leaps to freedom from upper-story windows—and where the largest number died attempting to escape.

Erected in 1961, the Wall stood for twenty-eight years before crumbling in the face of mass protests in the "unbloody revolution" of November 1989. That's how the story of the Wall ends, in a wave of hoopla and high spirits. But it began in stealth and secrecy forty Augusts ago. In the early morning hours of Sunday, August 13, 1961, this top-secret operation was carried out by the military and police, under the direction of the future head of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Erich Honecker. Its aim: to stop the flight of GDR citizens, especially skilled workers, to West Berlin.

Berliners called the Wall *"das Unding"*—the monstrosity. Before it was razed, at least 588 people died fleeing the GDR—including 25 border guards. And on the anniversary of its erection, Berliners remember. They remember how their world became, as the writer Christoph Hein put it, "this fenced-in playground that was my home." They remember the fury and the helplessness of suddenly feeling caged in their grey little nation—seemingly forever. The scene ran something like this:

As the sun peeks over the horizon on a beautiful Sunday morning, most East Berliners sleep on, unaware that construction of a wall has begun. But a few thousand are *Grenzgaenger* (border crossers), who work in the "other" Berlin. Mostly hotel and restaurant employees, their jobs are made lucrative by the uneven exchange rate. Each day they make the trip to West Berlin, showing their GDR identity cards and special work permits to the bored *Grepos* (*Grenzpolizei*, border police).

But this morning is different. *"Die Grenze ist geschlossen!"* people scream to each other in the early morning stillness. "The border is closed!" No subway cars are running westward; *Grepos* turn back *Grenzgaenger* at every checkpoint. The Communist Party (SED) has apparently found a way to secure its future—by walling its people in.

As the *Grenzgaenger* stumble home and East Berliners awaken to the nightmare, it is as if a tremendous howl—the anguished wail of cornered, trapped animals—has gone up throughout East Berlin. For almost a decade, East Germany's 600-mile border has been sealed by barbed wire and twelve-foot-high electrified fencing; just inside the fence is a strip of land about fifty yards wide, cleared of brush, dotted with mines, and covered by machine guns in high watchtowers. And so, most aspiring refugees make their way to East Berlin, where many of the streets and subway stations along the border are guarded casually. Here the task of reaching the West is comparatively easy: one can cut through a backyard, or hop the subway and ride it for a stop or two. And so, the *Grenzgaenger*, like most East Germans, have always thought there would be time to pack their bags; they have always assumed the day of decision was theirs to choose.

They were wrong—and now it is too late. Overnight, their world has changed, utterly.

The Wall was thrown up with brutal Prussian efficiency. Early Saturday evening, police were summoned, without explanation, to their barracks. Soviet troops, under the command of Marshal Ivan Koniev, were placed on full alert. Until 10 A.M., no more than twenty top advisors knew of the plan. Secrecy was vital: the word "wall" was never spoken; indeed, not a single word about the operation had been committed to paper until that Saturday evening.

By midnight, the operation had begun. The planning group, under Honecker's direction, issued envelopes marked "Top Secret" to all company commanders. Stasi agents (secret police) immediately took up posts at all major intersections between the Soviet and Western sectors. At 1 A.M., East German troops arrived at border points to unload barbed wire, concrete posts, stone blocks, picks, and shovels. Politically reliable factory brigades and police worked diligently to close all passageways in the circumference of West Berlin's 103-mile border. At 4 A.M., West Berlin radio issued the first panicky news reports of the commotion in the streets. The Iron Curtain had literally been built. And 17 million people were now trapped.

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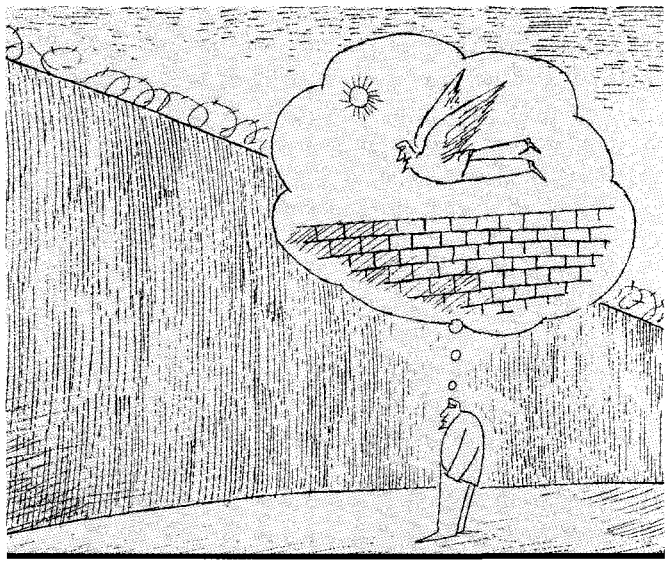

Yes, finally, believed SED leaders, citizens would cooperate with the government and accept that their future and the GDR's were the same. People would begin to regard East Germany as their *Heimat* (homeland)—since they now had no choice. The Western media, however, would choose a more ominous term—"the barbed-wire state"—and dub August 13 *Stacheldrahtsonntag* (barbed-wire Sunday).

"August 13." The date would go down in German history without any need to mention the year: everyone knew the referent.

Walter Ulbricht, SED chief, had long urged the Wall on his Warsaw Pact allies, who worried that such an expedient might trigger World War III and, in any case, would become a burdensome anti-Socialist propaganda symbol. But Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's incognito tour, in a Mercedes-Benz limousine, through prosperous West Berlin in late July finally convinced him that Ulbricht was right. Given that every day up to one thousand people were fleeing to the West, the lifeblood of the GDR was flowing into—and then out of—Berlin, an open wound in the side of the Soviet bloc.

August 13: barbed-wire Sunday. By 4 P.M., as temperatures soar into the low 90s, the incendiary materials for a potential conflagration are heating up along the barbed-wire boundary. Half a million Berliners, East and West, are massed along the sector line. The police keep East Berliners well back from the ongoing construction; the West Berlin police restrain West Berliners, who are calling for action. An estimated 533,000 East German troops and paramilitary police stand poised, waiting for trouble.

But where are the 40,000 Western troops stationed permanently in West Berlin for just such an emergency?

In their barracks. Allied military officials have confined soldiers to their quarters. There is little the West can do. Is interference with the Wall—which, after all, stands on the GDR side—worth the risk of World War III? No. The West will act only to prevent a Soviet takeover of West Berlin or to maintain access routes to the city.

Overnight, the torrent of East German refugees drops to a trickle. The total of escapes on barbed-wire Sunday numbers no more than a few hundred, and no more than a few dozen on August 14.

Official East German radio celebrates this barrier as the "anti-fascist wall of protection." West Berlin had become a den of terrorists serving imperialist intelligence forces. GDR citizens were, in effect, being kidnapped by "slave traders," West German recruiting agents who "lured" them into the West, where they were forcibly inducted into the West German army or made to work in Western munitions factories.

In the months to come, the "anti-fascist wall of protection" will ultimately snake for twenty miles through the heart of Berlin, slashing its way across highways and back alleys, inflicting its schizophrenia on whatever it traverses. "Protecting" East Germans "for their own good," it amputates historic squares, desecrates graveyards and gardens, deforms entire street fronts into sickly concrete slabs, divides families and friends.

The West Germans call it the "wall of outrage." And, as the Warsaw Pact allies feared, the political cost is enormous. Almost every nation outside the Communist sphere condemns the Wall, which now stands as a propaganda symbol to be exploited by the West.

But Ulbricht willingly pays that price. For now the East German work force is captive; party orders can be enforced with maximum repression—and without concern about stampeding millions into fleeing. Now, finally, the GDR population will stabilize. GDR planners can, at long last, calculate their economic outlays and manpower levels, free from worry that—tomorrow or next week—half of the skilled workers, the technical elite, and the youth will hop the subway and head West.

The Wall has saved the GDR, which has lost more than 4 million citizens since 1945; but it has also upped the ante. For by walling in the population the regime has undermined the endlessly cited alibi with which it rationalized failure. Treating massive emigration as a cause rather than an effect of their policies, SED officials now deprive themselves of the "explanation" for their every blunder. Now the party has no excuses; it is up to economic planners to prove what they can do. Now that the party has built the Wall, can it finally "build socialism"?

The events of November 1989 provided the sobering, definitive answer—a resounding "no."

Today, many Germans maintain that a wall continues to divide Germans—a psychological and economic wall. *"Die Mauer im Kopf"*—the wall in our heads—persists, given that Easterners remain far more supportive of Socialist ideals than Westerners. And living standards in the East still lag substantially behind those in the West. But no Eastern German seriously wants the Wall back. Forty years marooned in the desert of the GDR (1949–89) sufficed. □

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ANTHROPOLOGY WITH A DIFFERENCE

Mary Douglas at 80

Paul Baumann

In its issue of October 6, 1995, the *Times Literary Supplement* printed a list of the "hundred books which have most influenced Western public discourse since the Second World War." Works by Ludwig Wittgenstein, George Orwell, Jean-Paul Sartre, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Albert Camus, Erik Erikson, and Primo Levi were among the expected selections, along with Daniel Bell's *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* and Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature.*

Only four books written by women were included, the most academic being *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966) by the British social anthropologist Mary Douglas. *Purity and Danger* stood alongside Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, and Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great Cities*. Still in print after nearly forty years, Douglas's essay deals with such esoteric topics as the logic and thematic coherence of the dietary laws in the book of Leviticus and the seemingly macabre ritual murder of elderly "spearmasters" among the Dinka of East Africa. These, along with other fascinating examples, were used to demonstrate the correspondence between social experience and religious beliefs and symbols. What appears to be irrational superstition among so-called primitive peoples, Douglas argued, can in fact be explained by examining how a culture's system of classifications mirrors its social institutions.

Richard Fardon, anthropologist and Douglas biographer (*Mary Douglas: An Intellectual Biography*, 1999), describes *Purity and Danger* as an "embarrassment of riches." That phrase applies to almost all of the eighty-year-old Douglas's work. Her vivid, pugnacious writing style and vast, eclectic store of knowledge have been displayed in more than fifteen books and numerous essays and reviews. Her interests have ranged far and wide: how contemporary societies assess environmental risks; the way consumer behavior communicates social concerns; the relationship between ritual and jokes; the rational basis of witchcraft accusations; the etiquette of eating and drinking; even the debate about ordaining women (see "A Modest Proposal," *Commonweal*, June 14, 1996), and the quest for the historical Jesus.

Paul Baumann *is executive editor of* Commonweal. *The research and writing of this article were funded by a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc.*

I first encountered Douglas's work in 1980 in a class on ritual taught by the liturgist Aidan Kavanagh, O.S.B., at Yale Divinity School. We read Douglas's *Natural Symbols* (1970), which expressed deep skepticism about Vatican II's reforms and took "reforming bishops and radical theologians" to task for "their doctrinal latitude, their critical dissolving of categories and attack on intellectual and administrative distinctions." Douglas argued that too many of the council's reforms were carried out with little appreciation for what makes rituals and symbols meaningful, and with even less understanding of how attitudes toward religious conformity depend on a person's social location. It was Douglas's contention, for instance, that the abolition of Friday abstinence from meat did away with a vital symbol of Catholic identity and solidarity. To those who argued that abstinence was more spiritually authentic if it was a personal decision, not a group discipline, Douglas pointed out that dispensing with such shared symbols would not make self-denying acts more likely or more intelligible, but quite the opposite.

In the Belgian Congo, 1949

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Finishing the book, I found myself a newly minted skeptic about the "rationalistic" reform of the liturgy. *Natural Symbols* had convinced me that my grandfather's bead-counting, literal-minded piety—he had only an eighth-grade education—was not the mere superstition my prosperous middle-class world judged it to be. Douglas's passionate defense of ritual reawakened in me an appreciation of the connection between beauty and truth in religion and other human activities.

Internal Catholic disputes are only a small part of Douglas's interests. I had been a college student in the early 1970s, years marked by great social and political conflict as well as moral confusion. I had become skeptical of the motives of student protesters, whose "radicalism" and iconoclasm in the end always seemed as self-interested as it was theatrical. In *Natural Symbols*, Douglas argued that the student upheavals of the late 1960s, with their mass demonstrations and demand for unstructured freedoms, conformed to a familiar historical pattern. The conventional wisdom was that such protests were compensation for deprivation. Douglas noted that "compensation theory" could not explain the privileged status of most of the protesters. She contended that the undifferentiated and often ecstatic nature of student protest was not a form of compensation but "replicated" the social experience of the young. The lives of students lacked "articulated roles" or any group allegiance and were characterized instead by ego-focused competition and fleeting, easily dissolved social bonds. This described my undergraduate experience quite well, and I thought it helped explain the frustrations and disillusionment that followed in the wake of the extravagant 1960s.

Fortuitously, Mary Douglas arrived on the Yale campus the next fall (she was working at the Russell Sage Foundation in New York City) to teach a course on "Methodological Issues in the Study of Religion." I enrolled, and spent the next few months spellbound—and frankly a bit overwhelmed—by her command of the anthropological literature on apparently everything: population control in primitive groups, the nature of contemporary sectarian religious conflict, how different societies conceive of the separation or unity of spirit and matter. Douglas is a great storyteller, and she readily culled examples from African, New Guinean, and Native American cultures to illustrate a passing point. Explaining the moral integrity of "primitive" beliefs and questioning the social nexus out of which modern moral assumptions emerge were part of her pedagogic technique. For me the destruction of the stark dichotomy between primitive and modern consciousness broadened my understanding of how rationality works and deepened my sense of what all humankind holds in common.

The social basis of belief

Much of Douglas's work is an effort to develop a method that enables us to recognize the cultural bias or "blinders" that shape our views. In *Natural Symbols*, for example, Douglas presents a theory, developed from the work of sociologist Basil Bernstein, about how differing patterns of authority in working-class and upper-middle-class families restrict how children perceive the world. In working-class environments, authority is often conveyed in a "restricted" code. Explanations for why something should be done are hierarchical and positional: Because Dad says so. A more "elaborated" code, stressing the calculation of competing interests and the personal feelings of others, is used in less traditional, and often more prosperous households. The elaborated code is, of course, the method of rational analysis and of the academy. But Douglas argues that a restricted code possesses value as well, one that enables children—and adults—to see their lives unfolding within an overall pattern. Those reared exclusively in an elaborated code find it difficult to respond to condensed symbols of social solidarity, such as the Eucharist. Consequently, whole areas of aesthetic experience are closed off to them. Having been raised in a very "positional" home, I recognized the truth of this analysis. Years of playing organized athletics also convinced me that certain aesthetic and moral experiences are available only to those who are willing to conform to hierarchical social forms. As every family knows, there really is a good to be experienced together that cannot be experienced alone, but it requires a willingness to sacrifice for the whole.

At the end of the course, Douglas gave me a copy of Antonia White's Catholic coming-of-age novel, *Frost in May* (1933). The novel, she explained, is set in the Sacred Heart Convent at Roehampton in West London. For many readers, *Frost in May* is a kind of horror story about authoritarian and taboo-ridden pre-Vatican II Catholic schooling. Douglas saw it quite differently. She had been a student at Roehampton, and she thought *Frost in May* brilliantly captured the vividness and startling beauty of that world—a beauty inseparable from its carefully delineated social structure.

Not surprisingly, Douglas's Catholicism has strongly influenced her work. Already in *Purity and Danger*, she alerted readers to the way the discipline of anthropology grew out of the British colonial and essentially Protestant encounter with tribal peoples, and how the Enlightenment bias in favor of "ethical" rather than "ritualistic" or "revealed" religion colored nearly everything written about so-called primitive belief. Making an argument she would elaborate in *Natural Symbols*, Douglas wrote that "magical practice, in this sense of automatically effective ritual" is not a sign of irrationality or primitiveness, "nor is a high ethical content the prerogative of evolved religions." She took pains to show the similarities between the way modern and primitive people think about morality and religion. The need to classify and categorize experience is universal, she argued. Our understanding of what is "natural" is always filtered through socially constructed categories of what is good or bad, holy or profane, safe or risky, or ambiguous. Taboo is a violation of classifications. "Dirt," she famously wrote, "is matter out of place."

Douglas strongly objected to the denigration of ritual and

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traditional forms of religious knowledge implicit in the early anthropological paradigm. The idea that primitive peoples were psychologically unbalanced or irrational (see "The Myth of Primitive Religion," *Commonweal*, October 9, 1970) reflected the self-congratulatory prejudices of anthropological observers, not the human or moral reality of tribal life. A high regard for religious knowledge is also evident in her rejection of the idea that secularism and modern unbelief are the result of science's triumph over superstition. Tribal societies, such as the Pygmies, can be just as irreligious or secular in their outlook as any free-spirited New Yorker, she writes. Science is a tool for solving problems in the natural world, but it has relatively little to do with religious ideas or our everyday moral decision-making.

It's how we organize our communities, not what science tells us about the origins of the universe, that determines the shape of our religious beliefs. In this Douglas is a disciple of Emile Durkheim, one of the founders of sociology and the author of *The Elemental Forms of Religious Life* (1912). Durkheim emphasized how society shapes the way individuals think, and how our ideas about God mirror our relationship to the community. Baldly put, the more cohesive a group, the more it will conceive of God as an enforcer of moral rules; the less cohesive, the more benign God will appear. Modern doubts about the existence of sin or hell, for example, are better explained by our independence and mobility than by the idea of intellectual progress. Following Durkheim and her Oxford mentor Edward Evans-Pritchard, Douglas thinks differences in religious belief—how we think about metaphysical questions, or even if we bother to think about them at all—can be explained sociologically, for instance, by comparing how people hold each other accountable for misfortune.

"The idea is that you really don't sort out problems in your head," Fardon said of Douglas's insistence on the social basis of belief and knowledge. "You sort out problems by behaving differently, then your head will take care of itself. And that goes back to that system of education where you are educated through practices, through bodily practices and punctuality, and sitting in a certain way. And of course that's pretty much what Durkheim was saying as well. You don't go study people's religious beliefs; you go and look at what they do. On the basis of what they do, then you'll figure out why they believe what they do."

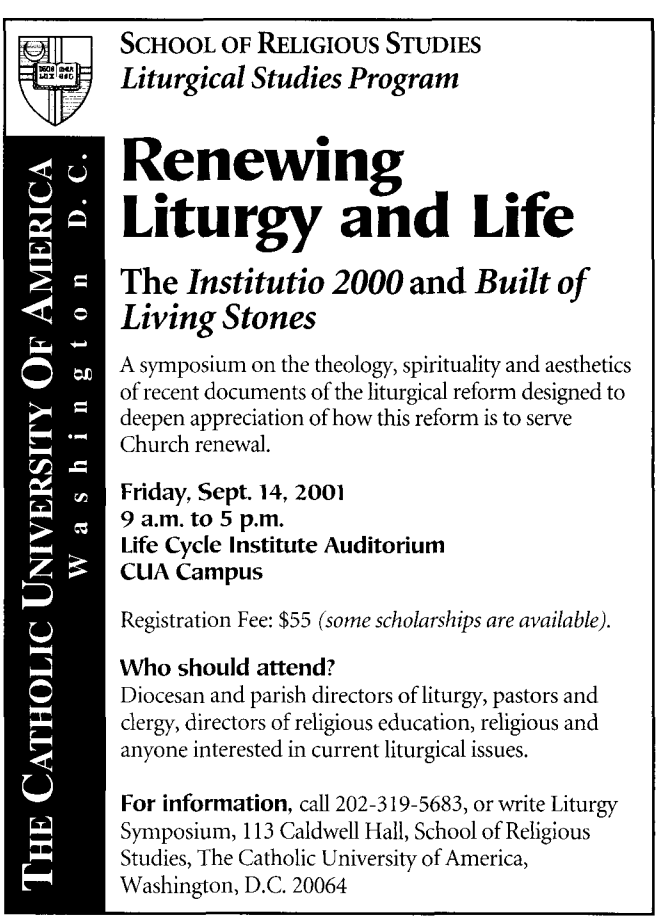
"There's a bit of existentialism thrown in," Fardon added. "You have to choose between different forms of life, and you have to make a commitment to one. So the idea of practical commitment is important."

Douglas, however, is not a thoroughgoing sociological determinist. What she rejects is methodological individualism, which assumes that everyone is a self-interest maximizer and that the individual, not social structural forces, should be the proper unit of analysis. "There is knowledge, but it is always influenced by social factors," she told me. "We can't afford not to take them into account. We can't afford to have this naive foundationalist view of knowledge."

At home in London

Mary Douglas is as direct and challenging in person as she is on the page. A petite woman with penetrating hazel eyes and trimly cut white hair, Douglas has an incorrigible intensity and buoyant sense of humor. She turned eighty in March, but looks fifteen years younger, and is possessed of the kind of energy and industry one can only envy. At an age when most people have placed their word processors in mothballs, she continues writing at a rate that would make a freshly minted Ph.D. proud—or a biographer nervous.

Douglas graces her conversation with a sly smile and mischievous laugh. Her impatience with questions she doesn't like matches her enthusiasm for ones she does. She speaks emphatically, often answering with a simple yes or no. She is gracious but opinionated; her view of her own work and accomplishments can be blunt. She openly laments the fact that she never held a long-term appointment at a major research institution. "Mary always wanted to have a school," Fardon told me when I spoke with him last fall in London, "a group of people who would be doing things which were one way or another informed by her ideas. But she also made it very difficult for herself to have that, because she was attracted to work with people whom she found original, quirky,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and stimulating, but inevitably found she couldn't always agree with them."

Douglas retired from teaching in 1988, after spending much of the late 1970s and the '80s in the United States, first at the Russell Sage Foundation, then Northwestern and Princeton. Today she lives in the Highgate section of north London, where she and her husband James, an economist and former policy adviser for the Conservative Party, have owned a home since 1956. The Douglases have traveled widely, making friends around the world, especially in the United States; yet, even without Mr. Douglas's enthusiastic exclamations of "Marvelous!" and "Jolly good!" they remain, at least in the eyes of an American, unmistakably English.

The couple celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary in April, and proximity to their three grown children and six grandchildren was a major reason for their return to England. They now spend much of their time at home, although Mary makes regular trips to the British Library for research on her latest intellectual passion—a reexamination of Numbers (*In the Wilderness*, 1993) and Leviticus. Her *Leviticus as Literature* (1999) includes a remarkable revision of her earlier views on how the system of classifications worked in the Jewish dietary laws. "I don't think I got much of it right," Douglas told me. It's hard not to be impressed by this matter-of-fact concession of error.

Douglas is circumspect about her years in the convent school in the 1930s. Nevertheless, it is clear that her appreciation for religious values was kindled at Roehampton, along with her conviction that the measure of a society is how it controls the powerful and cares for those at the bottom of the social ladder.

The Douglases' comfortable four-bedroom house is close to Highgate cemetery (where Karl Marx and other luminaries rest) and a short walk from Hampstead Heath. Her trained interest in domestic rituals carries over into her own kitchen. "I love to cook," she said unabashedly after lunch as we stood before her large kitchen window looking into a surprisingly green (it was November) English garden. A love of cooking isn't surprising for someone long fascinated by customs surrounding eating and drinking. Alert to every social boundary and interaction, Douglas sees all interpersonal acts, from the most mundane to the most intimate, as fraught with social meaning. "Drinks are for strangers, acquaintances, workmen, and family," she writes in her essay "Deciphering a Meal." "Meals are for family, close friends, honored guests."

Jim Douglas, now eighty-two and hobbled by arthritis, helps with the cooking. Because of his hearing loss, conversation must be conducted at a high decibel, although Jim can effortlessly read Mary's lips. Known as a Tory "wet," Jim was committed to what was known as the "postwar consensus"—economic and welfare policy based on John Maynard Keynes and William Henry Beveridge—which was abandoned by the Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher. He subsequently retired from the party staff. That decision enabled Mary to accept an offer to come to the United States, where Jim secured appointments in university political science departments.

Both of their fathers served abroad in Britain's colonial empire, Mary's father in the Indian Civil Service in Burma, and Jim's in the army in India. It was Jim's mother who introduced them. "Mary always says that it was only when my mother stopped insisting on Mary that I asked her to marry me," Jim confessed to the amusement of both.

Growing up in Paris, Jim was sent to Beaumont, an English Jesuit boarding school. Mary spent her early years in Burma. When she was twelve her mother died and she and her younger sister, Pat, were enrolled in the Roehampton convent where her mother and cousins had been students.

Douglas is circumspect about her years in the convent school in the 1930s. Nevertheless, it is clear that her appreciation for religious values was kindled at Roehampton, along with her conviction that the measure of a society is how it controls the powerful and cares for those at the bottom of the social ladder. Her memories of the convent, where she rose to be head girl, are almost entirely positive. Still, she acknowledges that not everyone thrived in the severe and highly structured environment. But during Douglas's time, the convent's rich symbolic life and emphasis on hierarchy and group solidarity gave her an abiding sense of how social structure inculcates values and how nonverbal forms of communication both reflect and reinforce group bonds.

Douglas has remarked elsewhere how the solicitude of the nuns after her mother's death had created in her an intense attachment to Catholicism. "Added to the sense of irreparable loss and the need to enshrine her memory in my life, was loyalty to the nuns themselves," she told interviewer Peter Fry in 1997. "They weighed in heavily, creating a special bereavement entitlement for orphans—spoiling and favoritism. The weight of their rules was continually lightened by loving privilege. This no doubt gives me my bias toward hierarchy as a particularly empowering form of government."

She is convinced that the social intimacy and concern for others much longed for in modern societies, but rarely attained, is best achieved in tightly bounded hierarchical settings. Hierarchy also helps solve problems. "Its rules are formalized; it plans for the long term, and justifies what it

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does by reference to tradition," she has written. "Its advantages are in its clearly stratified and specialized pattern of roles: it can organize effectively; it is resilient and tenacious in the face of adversity. It tries to conciliate its rival units."

Douglas champions what she calls "benign" hierarchy, where listening is emphasized, different gifts recognized, and graces shared. In the convent, she said, there were lay sisters who were subordinate to the highly educated "choir nuns." Lay sisters did all the housekeeping. At the same time, however, the lay sisters were recognized as being much holier than the choir nuns, and stories abounded of the power of the lay sisters' prayers. The greater efficacy and prestige attached to the lay sisters' prayers balanced out the higher status of the choir nuns.

"In our society, any experience our colleagues and readers and friends have of hierarchy is General Motors," Douglas added. "That's not a hierarchy in my sense, at all, because it hasn't got natural balancing corrections. It just is literally a movement which people can be kicked out of at any time. Whereas in my idea of hierarchy nobody can kick you out; you're always there, so your voice is always important. Hierarchy, as I idealize it, has got movements of communication up and down."

But whatever the organizational strengths and spiritual merits of Roehampton's hierarchy, the academic program was spotty at best. The sisters of the Society of the Sacred Heart "really despised the world and all its exams and works and pomps. Especially exams!" she said. Latin, for example, was not taught. Math and science were also conspicuously weak, and foreign languages not much stronger.

But the curriculum included courses on Catholic doctrine and the social teaching of the church. In these Douglas developed an interest in how any society or institution can structure itself in a way that enables it to exercise what she calls "concern for the whole." At that time, English Catholic school children studied the papal encyclicals *Rerum novarum* and *Quadragesimo anno*. "So we had two years of studying those, about the just wage, the living wage," Douglas said. "I can't remember much more, but it was about social problems in a philosophical vein. So that was really exciting."

At Oxford, Douglas studied philosophy, politics, and economics. Graduating while Britain was at war, she went to work in the Colonial Office in London. It was there that she first met some of the most prominent British anthropologists, including Audrey Richards and Raymond Firth. Fascinated, she read extensively in the field. Encountering the work of Edward Evans-Pritchard, one of the seminal figures in twentieth-century anthropology, was a turning point.

Evans-Pritchard was a convert to Catholicism, and this was of paramount importance, Douglas admitted. "I met some great anthropologists in London and I knew that they were mocking Catholicism. I thought, that's no place for me...I'd better go where Evans-Pritchard was."

Evans-Pritchard was to become Douglas's teacher, mentor, and model, and she eventually paid tribute to him in a brief intellectual biography written for the Modern Masters series (*Edward Evans-Pritchard*, 1980). Evans-Pritchard's ethnological work on witchcraft among the Azande and on Nuer politics and religion—both East African tribal cultures—was pathbreaking. Living with the Azande, he learned their language and practiced the tribe's witchcraft rites, judging them to be logically coherent and socially efficacious. Douglas speaks of how Evans-Pritchard taught about "the sacredness of knowledge" and about "synthesizing from what was there, not going off into theorizing" or indulging in fashionable generalizations or idiosyncratic speculation, something Douglas thinks much recent anthropological writing does.

Genius at lateral thinking

Princeton philosopher Jeffrey Stout (*Ethics after Babel*, 1988), a former colleague and neighbor of the Douglases, confirms the connection between Douglas's Catholic upbringing and her anthropological method. "One way of reading her most important book, *Natural Symbols*, is as a traditionalist Catholic's critique of the liberalizing trends associated with Vatican II," Stout told me. "I think it is fair to say that many liberals, including many liberal Catholics, have made naive assumptions about how societies work. And they have also taken a sort of atomistic individualism for granted when making their complaints about hierarchy and tradition. Mary has pretty much made mincemeat of these opponents."

In the 1960s, when much of the Western world was infatuated with the notion of liberation from traditional structures and morality and with the celebration of emotional authenticity, Douglas cautioned against trusting either. "How to humanize the machine is the problem...[and] these humanizing influences depend upon continuity with the past, benevolent forms of nepotism, irregular charity, extraordinary promotions, freedom to pioneer in the tradition of the founders, whoever they were. Instead of antiritualism it would be more practical to experiment with more flexible institutional forms and to seek to develop their ritual expression."

Douglas's venture into the debates about Vatican II did not sit well with some of her colleagues. Her combative defense of Friday abstinence, affirmation of transubstantiation, and praise for hierarchical principles provoked both consternation and enmity. Writing with barely concealed contempt in the *New York Review of Books* (January 28, 1971) the eminent Cambridge anthropologist Edmund Leach railed against Douglas's praise of traditional Catholic practice. "All her recent work gives the impression that she is no longer much concerned with the attainment of empirical truth; the object of the exercise is to adapt her anthropological learning to the service of Roman Catholic propaganda," Leach wrote.

Douglas's status within her field, which in the 1970s and '80s increasingly turned away from the "participant observer" method developed by the classic British anthropological tradition, has had its ups and downs. There were a

(continued on page 18)

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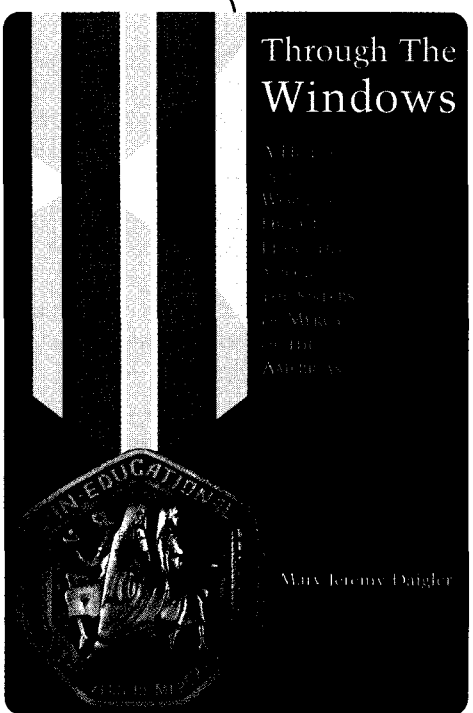

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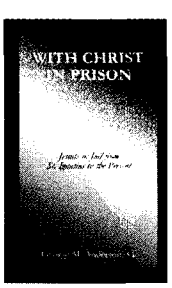

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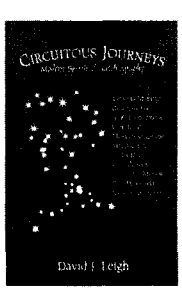

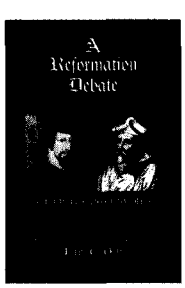

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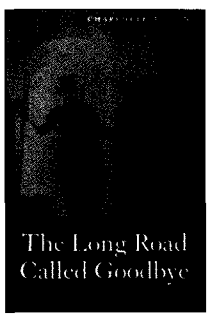

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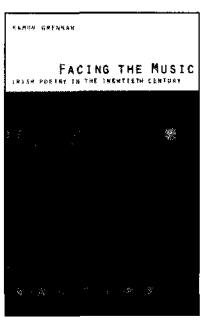

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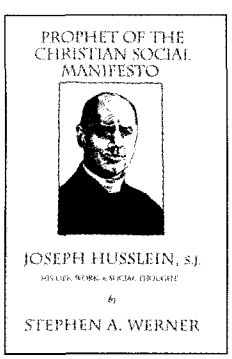

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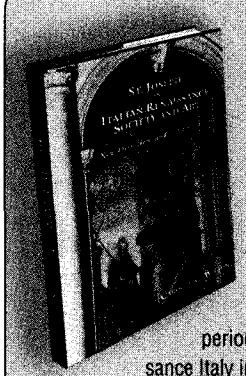

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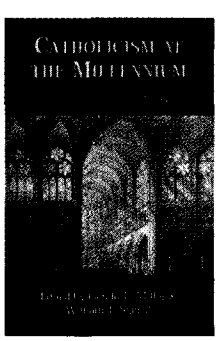

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(continued from page 15)

handful of prominent women working in anthropology in the early 1950s—Douglas spent two relatively brief periods "in the bush," in 1949–50 and 1953, both studying the Lele in what was then the Belgian Congo—and most of them were atheists and predominantly left-leaning. "A conventionally Catholic, middle-class woman married to a Tory grandee, that wasn't your average background for a woman anthropologist," Fardon, her biographer, said. "I can't think of another one at all. Anthropology has always gone along with the Left, with the cultural relativists and so forth."

As a result, Douglas's pioneering achievements in bringing anthropological methods to bear on contemporary concerns tended to be overlooked. But a reassessment may be underway. Adam Kuper, author of *Anthropology and Anthropologists: The Modern British School* (1996), compares her to Claude Levi-Strauss, Pierre Bourdieu, Ernest Gellner, and Margaret Mead. "Mary is one of the few anthropologists who have become general intellectual figures," he said when I called him at Brunel University in London, where he is professor of anthropology. I asked him to evaluate the importance of Douglas's work. She was one of the few anthropologists, he said, who could communicate with philosophers, historians, and literary people.

At the Convent of the Sacred Heart (center), 1934

Kuper calls Douglas a "genius of lateral thinking," and that may be her true hallmark as an intellectual, an ability to perceive identities between seemingly disparate phenomena. In her hands the modern corporate media baron in London looks and sounds uncannily like the "Big Man" of the Indonesian cargo cults. In her critique of fashionable trends in parenting, she warns that child-centered education may free the young from "a system of rigid positions" only to make them a "prisoner of a system of feelings and abstract principles."

"She was able to make connections, able to take a study of taboo in the jungle and give you a whole new way of thinking about Leviticus, which never would have occurred to people who spent their lives studying Leviticus," Kuper said.

Yet despite Douglas's own objections to loose speculation or theorizing, her cross-cultural comparisons have been criticized for a lack of rigor, a tendency to generalization, and an inattention to detail. Even those sympathetic to *Natural Symbols* found that book confusing, some of its conclusions unwarranted by the evidence. Perhaps the book's most problematic idea was "grid-group" analysis. Grid-group was Douglas's effort to develop a typology of societies and their cosmologies in which social location predicted religious beliefs. Social organization is broken down into four kinds of institutional life: hierarchical, sectarian (or enclave), competitive individualistic, and isolates. By measuring to what extent a society conceived of itself as a bounded entity (group) and in what ways individuals relate to each other within that group (grid), what beliefs would be held about everything from sin to sorcery to sexual morality could be predicted. Critics found the criteria for identifying the relative strengths of both group and grid hard to pin down and the whole scheme overly deterministic.

Characteristically, Douglas now readily admits the problems with the book. "I wrote it in a great heat of excitement," she told me. "It is a pity that I didn't sort out the book. It's very confused and difficult." But *Natural Symbols* has also provided a mother lode of ideas about religion, society, and cultural bias that Douglas has mined for the last thirty years. The grid-group method has been extensively refined. Now called "cultural theory," it has been used by an eclectic group of social scientists, including most prominently the late Aaron Wildavsky, with whom Douglas collaborated in writing *Risk and Culture* (1982). Cultural theory has contributed to the study of consumer behavior, labor movements, political parties, and more.

"It's a way of understanding organizational arrangements and the discourses they support and that support them," said Steve Rayner, director of the Program in Environmental Policy Studies and professor at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. Rayner, a former graduate student of Douglas's, has taken her ideas about the social determinants of belief and applied them to a variety of social-science concerns, especially environmental questions. He thinks Douglas has done a remarkable job of encapsulating the fundamental principles of all social organization. "The cultural theory approach requires you to unlearn a lot of social science," Rayner said, noting that social science operates on a mistaken individualist paradigm. "What we're saying as cultural theorists is that a lot of values and a lot of beliefs and a lot of knowledge are stabilized as an emergent property of social organization," he said. "So you start with relationships instead of the individuals for understanding. That's really a very radical breakaway from mainstream social science."

Brunel University's Adam Kuper said that while any of Douglas's particular analyses may be shown to be in error,

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something she seems quite ready to admit, the way in which Douglas has thought about culture will make a lasting contribution. She turned her skill at explaining seemingly strange behavior in primitive cultures to the rituals and beliefs of people in modern industrial societies, and in the process showed us how strange our own behavior can be. "Examining primitive cultures turned out to explain the Americans and Brits," Kuper added. "That sort of comparative jump—that is the inspiration that will remain."

Douglas's analytical method does not come with a predetermined answer about what organizational structure is best in any particular circumstance. "I'm completely nonpolitical," Douglas told me, which is another way of saying that the relationship between her work and her own religious "biases" is complex. She is not interested in demonstrating the self-evident superiority of her faith. Rather, she seems more concerned with making plain the merits of what many dismiss as anachronistic religious practice. Douglas admits that something about religious experience escapes reductionist analysis. However, as an anthropologist, her interest is in explaining the variety of religious expression and the dynamics of religious change. Whatever supernatural reality may be, perception of it is mediated by social life. In this sense, as the biblical exhortation to follow God's commandments promises, the way we live can disclose aspects of reality that are inaccessible to those who choose to live in a different way. "What I'm saying," Douglas told me several years ago, "is that when people are citing theology—the reformer's theology, for example—they have in mind some sort of ideal society which would make sense of that theology. Therefore, we should unmask it a bit, and ask them directly: Is that the kind of society you want? Is that the kind of society you think this church is for? And they should do the same thing to me, and I should be able to be explicit."

Sacramental religion

Asked to assess the condition of the church thirty years after the warnings issued in *Natural Symbols*, Douglas is hesitant. "I don't know enough about the church," she said. She confessed, for example, to having only recently realized how destructive the Index of Forbidden Books had been for Catholic intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century.

The Douglases are long-time parishioners at Saint Joseph's Church, just up the rather steep hill on which their handsome suburban neighborhood is laid out. Mary seems fond of, but worried about, her parish community, especially its aging clergy. "They've really got a thriving parish but they're all in their seventies and soon they will start falling off the perch. And there's absolutely no one else behind them."

Douglas is convinced on sociological grounds that modern culture makes accepting many of the church's claims—and even understanding the church's logic—difficult. But that doesn't mean she exonerates the hierarchy. The church's own actions also present obstacles. On a very personal note, she mentioned a violent outbreak of sorcery accusation and subsequent church-sponsored exorcisms in Zaire in the late 1970s and early 1980s, where the children of some of her friends among the Lele were tortured under the supervision of a local priest. Her efforts to involve the Roman bureaucracy in the crisis proved fruitless. She attributed much of the problem to the church's lack of understanding and respect for the traditional sorcery beliefs and practices of the Lele. Like Evans-Pritchard, she thinks exorcism can be a useful pastoral tool as well as a profound way of reflecting on the nature of evil. But the church in Zaire, she said, had not done a good job of getting across Catholicism's great teachings about sin and suffering, forgiveness and reconciliation. In the absence of such teaching, people reverted to older witchcraft practices, practices whose traditional safeguards against abuse had been rooted out in the Leles' conversion to Catholicism.

Douglas is also concerned about the role of women in the church today, which she describes as "absolutely iniquitous." "There should be something like a women's commission on doctrine, so we would get off all this sex that they're on so embarrassingly and get on to real doctrinal and theological problems," she said. A women's commission within the hierarchy, Douglas said, should have veto power over certain aspects of church teaching, thus giving women as a group a voice in church decision-making that counterbalances the authority of the all-male priesthood.

Despite these frustrations, Douglas's loyalty to the institution remains. "I do pick out what I love about a great religion, and I feel it a great privilege to be brought up in one," she said. "I probably idealize it, and I probably underestimate the costs, which people are hating. But I think they're not appreciating how much they're losing by undermining it."

She is pessimistic about the fate of a hierarchical and sacramental religion in an increasingly individualistic and socially fragmented world. "The more we have of telecommunications, individuals able to work at home, no ties, no bonds, not having to be somewhere, or not having to see each other, the more isolates we become. We can predict what kind of society that is. And that is one that won't be able to take on major ritual structures at all. Or have the richness of life, of symbolic life, of the hierarchical system." To Douglas it is an ineluctable impoverishment. "Open society," she has written, "leads to private religion."

Despite the elegiac tone of much she has written about contemporary Catholicism, Douglas's own work continues to be suffused with the values of constancy and dutifulness she absorbed in the convent: staying the course and remaining faithful to a larger vision.

What, looking back over all she has written, is Mary Douglas's favorite book? Without hesitation she answers, "It's always the one I'm doing. It ought to be." She continues to work on Leviticus and Numbers, determined to convince readers that these neglected biblical books are not impenetrable catalogues of arcane laws and irrational taboos, but works of great spiritual beauty. Don't bet against her success. □

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'A.I.'

One summer day back in the mid-1970s, a woman I know was hitchhiking on Cape Cod with two friends. The three, all college students, got picked up by a geeky guy in his late twenties who told them he was on a crew making a movie about a shark attack. Actually, he said, he was the director. They asked him how he was doing the shark attack in the movie.

"We have a machine," he said. "We have a mechanical shark."

They laughed. It sounded so rinky-dink.

From the start, Steven Spielberg has blurred the boundary between machines and animate beings, and the results, as the whole world knows, have been anything but rinky-dink. His first movie, *Duel* (made at age twenty-four!), a terse road thriller about a motorist terrorized by a truck driver across the highways of the West, turned the eighteen-wheel rig into a shark of the interstate, a terrestrial proto-*Jaws*. The eerily cute mannequin of *E.T.* pushed the Spielbergian theme of benign extraterrestrials bearing enlightenment. And *Jurassic Park*, ostensibly a harrowing cautionary tale of technology run amok, turned into family fun, the medium overwhelming the message, Spielberg's own technological wizardry pushing filmmaking entertainment to new levels of dazzle, suggesting an irrepressible optimism about the power of technology to fulfill human imagination.

A.I.: Artificial Intelligence represents the director's collaboration with the late Stanley Kubrick, whose vision—and property—*A.I.* was (he'd been chewing on it for nearly twenty years). Spielberg took over the project, using Kubrick's storyboards while rewriting the script, posing an intriguing hybrid of sensibilities: an upbeat and essentially humanistic moviemaker grafted onto a brooding, cerebral, much darker one. What monster of a movie would result?

A.I. takes place in a future American dystopia partly sunken beneath melted polar ice caps, where scutwork is done by androids, and an ambitious and visionary corporate scientist, Dr. Allen Hobby (William Hurt), undertakes to construct "a robot that can love...with a subconscious, an inner world of metaphor, of dreams." The company, Cybertronics, selects a grieving couple, Henry and Monica, whose child has died and been placed in cryogenic storage—precisely the clients real-life gen-tech companies are currently aiming at. But *A.I.* doesn't touch our cloning dilemma directly, because the child, David, played by Haley Joel Osment, isn't human—he's a robot, a mechanical toy. Instead, the movie focuses on Monica's confused response to David's programmed displays of affection. She knows he's not real, a mere machine, yet she can't help melting a little when he looks her in the eyes and says, "You're my Mommy." *A.I.* makes clear that we are machines, built to respond to emotional stimuli, even if we don't want to. Soon Monica is giving David her late son's teddy bear, pulling back in confusion even as she does.

A real momma's boy

In a similar way, the film keeps confusing and undercutting our responses. We see a little boy and a talking teddy bear wend their way over a hilltop under the moonlight, and it looks like another of Spielberg's cozy portrayals of family life and a child's fervent imagination. David is not a child, however, but a human simulacrum, and that walk in the woods leads not to some encounter with friendly aliens, but to a so-called Flesh Fair, a gladiatorial festival where robots are dismembered before a howling human audience. *A.I.* keeps us nicely off balance, our hearts continually pitted against our heads, Spielbergian images pumped full of Kubrickian ironies.

Both directors started their careers from realism and pushed toward fantasy or allegory, and the second half of *A.I.* turns explicitly on a fable. David has read Pinocchio, and decides that, like Pinocchio, he no longer wants to be a puppet, but a real boy. After Monica tearfully abandons him in the woods (she had been taking him back to Cybertronics for demolition, but can't go through with it), we follow his quest to find the Blue Fairy who will turn him into a real boy, so that his mother can finally love him. The journey leads ultimately back to David's creator at Cybertronics headquarters, in a half-submerged Manhattan office tower, where David, surrounded by a room full of

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replicas of himself, experiences rage and grief at the revelation of his origins, as Dr. Hobby waxes triumphant, ecstatic that David has evinced "the ability to chase our dreams—something no machine has ever done."

At times, it's hard to know what Spielberg is after in this welter of fantastic scenarios. We live in a country where women sell their eggs online, priced by donor beauty and IQ, and a futurist group called the Räelians is actively pursuing human cloning, yet *A.I.* feels surprisingly untopical; it doesn't (for instance) touch the profound narcissism, or the Darwinian eugenic darkness, underlying our headlong rush into genetic engineering. As satire, the movie is tantalizing but frustratingly obscure. What does it mean that we are made to sympathize with the robots vis-à-vis their hardhearted human creators, and that the sadistic and villainous emcee at the Flesh Fair sounds a warning against technological hubris ("Do not be fooled by the artistry of this creation!")? The last third of the movie rather bewilderingly piles up surreal events and suggestive ironies. David ends up in an amphibian helicopter, trapped beneath a fallen Ferris wheel among the relics of long-submerged Coney Island, staring raptly at the Blue Fairy statue of a Pinocchio amusement ride...only to be discovered there, frozen, two thousand years later—big time leap—by kindly robotic superbeings in a glacial post-human world. "These robots are originals," the beings muse as they study David. "They knew living people." And so, again ironically, David gets his wish: he is unique after all, the nearest thing to human; the most real. And his other wish, too. With a lock of Monica's hair, the beings manage to clone David's "mother" back for one day, but one day only, after which she must disappear forever.

Despite such notions as a DNA Sleeping Beauty, *A.I.* isn't finally interested in cloning or global warming or the nature of consciousness or technology and ethics. Like Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the movie takes on nothing less than what the theologians call teleology. And while grandiose, *A.I.*'s own end proves strangely moving, its absurdities and ironies yielding to a haunted and lonely beauty in its dreamlike closing sequences. There's enough Kubrick in the genetic code of *A.I.*'s material to prevent the kind of sentimental ending that marred Spielberg's *Schindler's List* and *Saving Private Ryan*. Spielberg's redemptive impulse is there, but muted and restrained, while Kubrick's own lurking misanthropy gets brightened, or lightened, into somberness. What results is the best of both temperaments—dark, but not heartless. *A.I.* delivers Spielberg's twist on Kubrick's gloomy Faustian fable—yes, we died by technology, but lived by it as well, and even expressed through it our deepest need. It's astonishing to see that staple of pop psychology, the inner child, turned into a dream voyager on behalf of all humanity, but somehow *A.I.* pulls it off in the figure of the robot boy calling out through eternity for its mother—both vestige and symbol of our own helpless, hard-wired quest for love. □

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Pragmatic to a fault?

The Metaphysical Club
A Story of Ideas in America
Louis Menand
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $27, 546 pp.

John T. McGreevy

Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. once described the priest author of a Catholic children's book, whom he had never met, as a "puke in an apron." Philosopher Charles Peirce contrasted his own philosophical system with the "methods of despotism" employed by Pius IX. William James admitted that his beloved pragmatism would not appeal to "papal minds." John Dewey described Catholicism as a "reactionary world organization."

That Louis Menand organizes his "story of ideas in America" around these four thinkers might give Catholic readers pause. But it shouldn't. Or better, it should, but they should still read the book. *The Metaphysical Club* is that rare thing, an intensely pleasurable intellectual history offering insights (even laughs) on almost every page. Readers of the *New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books* have become accustomed to Menand's stylish and informative essays on everything from the Beatles to Saul Bellow, but this extended project is still a revelation. Menand's subject is nothing less than the thinkers and ideas responsible for "moving American thought into the modern world," beginning with the horrors of the Civil War and ending on the precipice of World War II.

A startling number of characters make their appearance. A young Holmes, wounded at Antietam, expresses contempt for noncombatants voicing pious enthusiasm about noble causes. William James, trapped in a bizarre scientific mission to the Amazon, is struck by the importance of probability and relational thinking. John Dewey and Jane Addams, tromping through Chicago neighborhoods, ponder how best to remedy the plight of impoverished immigrants in this new industrial society. The Metaphysical Club itself, a reading group including Holmes, Peirce, and James that met episodically in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1872, turns out (in all likelihood) to be the setting in which Peirce first outlined a recognizable "pragmatism."

All this is exhilarating, as is Menand's conviction that a better understanding of these figures provides us with a better understanding of our own time. Nonetheless, specialists will occasionally shudder. Menand underplays antislavery sentiment in antebellum Boston, for example, in an effort to make Holmes more a rebel against his father's world. And Menand's biographical strategy, linking an individual thinker to things he or she experienced, saw, or did, has disadvantages. Ironically, this strategy can shove what college admission brochures call "the life of the mind" out of view. The financial and marital difficulties that marked Charles Peirce's days on this earth, for example, make for compelling (if grim) reading, but one wonders how to weigh them in comparison with the books Peirce himself read. Peirce found the work of the medieval Franciscan, Duns Scotus, absorbing but Menand does not explain why. Nor does Menand provide much analysis of why Peirce struggled to distinguish his own philosophical enterprise from the relativism he thought he saw in James. Peirce even (allegedly) devoted several hours a day as a young man to reading Kant. Out of sheer admiration for this numbing feat, we might expect a more detailed report of what it was that Peirce concluded.

"I'm a pragmatist."

A different sort of difficulty also lies beneath the glittering prose. Pragmatism for Menand is an "account of the way people think." James, Dewey, and Holmes became convinced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that appeals to any "truth" outside of human experience was a chimera, that ethics and values were inevitably contingent upon views held by particular men and women at particular moments. Only by using the methods of science—critical judgment, hy-

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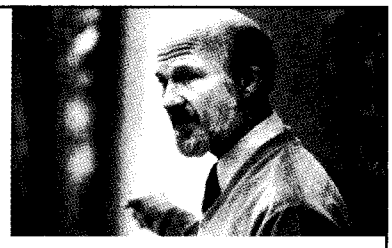
pothesis testing—could citizens confront social problems. Common to all these figures was a distaste for musty invocations of natural law or God's will. Holmes described "jurists who believe in natural law" as "in that naive state of mind that accepts what has been familiar and accepted by them and their neighbors as something that must be accepted by all men everywhere."

Here, for Catholics, was the rub. No single group of intellectuals was *more* attached to ideas of universal reason and natural law in the early twentieth century than Catholics. The Catholic natural law revival, begun in Italy and Germany in the early nineteenth century, and pushed along by Pope Leo XIII's 1879 encyclical mandating the study of Thomism, *Aeterni patris*, reached high tide even as Menand's protagonists developed the idea of pragmatism. And this, along with a residual anti-Catholicism in Menand's post-Protestants, explains the habitual resort to Rome as the polar opposite of their pragmatic vision. (No term aggravated Dewey more than "dogma.") Contrast the vision of Holmes, Dewey, and James with an opening assertion in the first English-language Catholic textbook published by an American Jesuit: "Truths that spring necessarily from the very nature of man and of human society, never change." The study of ethics, according to this Jesuit, is the identification of "fundamental principles from which all the more special rules of natural rectitude or morality are deduced."

The band of Catholic philosophers and theologians issuing (largely unread) challenges to James, Dewey, and Holmes were not an appealing group. Their cranky manifestoes, issued from redoubts in isolated seminaries and underfunded colleges, often substituted blanket condemnation for honest engagement. Reading *The Metaphysical Club*, in fact, sharpens one's sense that these Catholics were overmatched. James's luminous prose, Dewey's brave melding of politics and philosophical inquiry, and Holmes's epigrammatic judicial opinions have few equivalents in American letters, then or now.

Still, these Catholic polemicists did



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strike one very sensitive nerve. Are all values, after all, contingent? Is there anything that a state cannot do because such an action remains, to use a favorite Catholic term, *intrinsically* evil? Catholics were the most vocal (indeed, prescient) critics of Holmes's most notorious judicial opinion, *Buck* v. *Bell* (1927). Here Holmes authorized the commonwealth of Virginia to sterilize a woman, Carrie Buck, because of mental incompetence. "Three generations of imbeciles," Holmes famously declared, "are enough." (As it turned out, Buck's child did not develop any mental handicap.)

Menand regrets *Buck* v. *Bell*, in a paragraph, but later insists that eugenic ideas were "alien to everything James and Dewey wrote." Really? Recent historical work on this topic conclusively demonstrates the appeal of eugenics for progressive activists on both sides of the Atlantic. When one of the century's great liberals, Harold Laski, prepared a homage to Holmes in 1931, he did so in a volume that placed *Buck* v. *Bell* under the cheerful heading "On Legislative Freedom."

The important question is not whether James or Dewey themselves became eugenicists (they did not), but whether one could credibly challenge such programs armed with their collected works. Unsurprisingly, the reputations of James, Dewey, and Holmes reached a temporary nadir between the late 1930s and the 1960s, when the collapse of democracy across Europe, and then the Soviet threat, suggested the need for a more absolute, less pragmatic, defense of human freedom. (And eugenics, of a Nazi variety, demonstrated the dangers of some forms of "scientific" thinking about social problems.) Intellectuals from around the world drafted the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, spurred by the same impulse that led Martin Luther King Jr. to lead the fight against racial segregation in the Jim Crow South. "If we are wrong," King told the men and women assembled at Holt Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, on a December evening in 1955, in a decidedly nonpragmatic phrasing, "then God Almighty is wrong."

Menand persuasively attributes contemporary fascination with the pragmatists to the collapse of this moral urgency. "In the post-cold-war world," he writes, "where there are many competing value systems, not just two, skepticism about the finality of any particular set of beliefs has begun to seem to some people an important value again." The fascination is evident enough—adulatory studies of Dewey, James, and Holmes constitute virtually all recent writing on modern American intellectual history, and Richard Rorty's invocations of Dewey have spawned yet another tributary to the pragmatist stream.

Whether this fascination is cause for congratulation is another matter. Menand's reticence on this point—he ends with an oblique reference to the "relevance" and "strangeness" of his subjects—is frustrating, and I suspect, disingenuous. Menand claims to be writing "historical interpretation" and not "philosophical argument" but hints of advocacy do creep in. (Menand has, after all, edited a volume of pragmatic philosophical texts.) One wishes he had confronted more directly the meaning of Holmes, Dewey, and James for a world marked by diverse value systems, certainly, but also a world marked by interest in international human rights and Amnesty International. One wishes he had confronted the question of whether pragmatism's legacy helps us understand an American society still riven by debates about the meaning and definition of human life.

In all probability, to use a term favored by the pragmatists, answering such questions requires another book. On the evidence of the *The Metaphysical Club*, we should be eager to read it. □

John T. McGreevy *teaches history at the University of Notre Dame. He is completing a study of Catholicism and American liberalism, from slavery to abortion.*

HAPPILY EVER AFTER...

Thinks...
David Lodge
Viking, $24.95, 342 pp.

Jack Miles

Why does anyone ever write a novel? When a novelist asks himself that question, watch out: the answer may take the form of a novel. So it is in David Lodge's latest. Helen Reed, a novelist co-starring in it, worries in her journal: "Are we in danger of accumulating a fiction-mountain—an immense quantity of surplus novels, like the butter mountains and milk lakes of the EEC?...Of course one can argue that there's a basic human need for narrative: it's one of our fundamental tools for making sense of experience—has been, back as far as you can go in history. But does this, I ask myself, necessarily entail the endless multiplication of *new* stories?"

Helen's question is not so much why anyone ever wrote a novel but why anyone would, just now, want to write yet another. Does the accumulation of successive novels accrue in any way? Is there any other good that the goodness of a good novel might seem to serve, some research project to which a novelist like her might aspire to contribute?

If there were, then it would be a research project in human consciousness, Lodge suggests through the confrontation he has astutely contrived for Helen. Ralph Messenger, the cognitive scientist who is her co-star and campus colleague, reminisces about a certain Ludmila on a certain well-remembered evening in Prague when "all the time hovering over our conversation, like *'Thinks'* bubbles in a cartoon, were our respective speculations about how the evening would end. 'Does he want to sleep with me?' and 'Does she expect me to sleep with her?'"

Ralph is reminiscing into his tape recorder in an attempt to capture, pure-

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ly for research purposes, the bubbly stream of his own consciousness. What he is engaging in is not, as he sees it, fiction but science, yet scientific ambition in his chosen area—the study of human consciousness—is turning him into a novelist *malgré lui.*

In *Thinks...*, scientist Ralph on his tape recorder alternates with novelist Helen in her journal and with *magister ludi* Lodge giving us, as it were, the facts of this fiction. Imagine a melody of recurring triplets as in, say, *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*, and you will have both the structure and the lilting, processional bounce of this book.

Ralph is an atheist of the intermittently indignant sort. Helen is a lapsed Catholic of the intermittently wistful sort. Lodge, between them, smiles at the comedy of indignation and wistfulness; but this is a novel far less about belief and unbelief in God than about the same in fiction as an irreplaceable tool of human self-knowledge. There happens, just now, to be something of a dialogue between religion and cognitive science. Cambridge University Press has announced a book titled *Religion in Mind: Cognitive Perspectives on Religious Belief, Ritual, and Experience.* But Lodge, who is rather too automatically called a Catholic novelist, has other fish to fry this time out. He takes his cognitive science seriously enough that the acknowledgments page includes a bibliography with twenty-some titles, but none has much of a theological edge.

The edge here, and it is a subtly cutting edge, is located in the contrast between Ralph, who though undeceived about his rakish past is somehow not in possession of it, and Helen, who though deceived about hers (she learns only after her beloved husband's death that he was a serial adulterer), is somehow in possession of it after all. Language makes the difference. When Ralph suggests that they exchange his tapes for her journal, Helen declines, and Lodge's point is made.

The alternation of high and low is familiar in much if not most contemporary fiction, but an American reading this English novel of ideas will experience the familiar alternation with a distinct jolt, for *Thinks...* is peppered with English slang: *snog, swot, stroppy, chuffed, tup, chivvy, gobsmacked, canoodle*, and many another. English in another way are the literary imitations turned in by Helen's students on the theme, borrowed from cognitive science, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" We are offered one by M*rt*n Am*s, another by S*lm*n R*shd**, and so forth. These parodies, and a second set of writing exercises interrupting the triplet structure, are wickedly clever, if barely plausible for student writers, but one wonders whether Lodge isn't settling a few scores.

Yet what is most admirable about this book is also what is most amiable about it—namely, Lodge's way of tucking his characters in at night, their sins forgiven, and their circumstances mercifully ameliorated. A contrast is sometimes drawn between the classic British detective story (think Agatha Christie) and the classic American detective story (think Dashiell Hammett). In the former, order is restored after disruption; in the latter, order is revealed by disruption to be disorder. But at this point, it is surely the American alternative that has triumphed, triumphed so completely and in so many different artistic media that the exposure of order as disguised disorder has become the most tiresome of clichés. Lodge breaks with this cliché in the postmodern manner—that is, by flouting the modernist canon according to which if we have been there and done that, we must never go there and do that again. Like decoration in postmodernist architecture, the passé/outré happy ending of a Lodge novel is unabashed, undisguised, artistically self-conscious, and—for all those reasons—only the more satisfying as entertainment. Lodge risks being called merely clever just as certain postmodern architects risk being called merely amusing, but the best of the architects know just what they are doing, and so does this clever, yes, and endlessly amusing, but also sharp-eyed and sharp-tongued novelist. □

Jack Miles *is the author of* Christ: A Crisis in the Life of God, *forthcoming in the fall from Knopf, Heinemann (UK), Laffont (France), and Hanser (Germany).*

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Bad News
Where the Press Goes Wrong in the Making of the President
Robert Shogan
Ivan R. Dee, $26, 309 pp.

Robert Schmuhl

During a presidential election, combat takes place on several fronts. The citizenry bears witness to cut-throat competition among not only the political players seeking the White House, but also the media messengers trying to cover the race for increasingly fracturing audiences. Whatever the outcome, casualties and criticism abound at the end of each quadrennial battle, with calls for political and journalistic reform now a continuing refrain.

For Robert Shogan, veteran *Los Angeles Times* political correspondent and author of several books about the presidency, much of the blame for the public's (take your pick) alienation, anger, anxiety, or apathy is a consequence of journalistic performance that leaves much to be desired. From this volume's unequivocal title—*Bad News: Where the Press Goes Wrong in the Making of the President*—to its final paragraph, Shogan focuses on the faulty interplay between politics and communications at a time of roiling change in both realms.

Although John F. Kennedy's emphasis on image-enhancing television set the stage for a new kind of campaigning and governing, Shogan argues that 1968, not 1960, is the key to understanding what's happened in politics and journalism in recent decades. Eugene McCarthy's outsider challenge to Lyndon Johnson, Johnson's decision not to risk losing re-election, the assassination of Robert Kennedy, the bloody upheaval at the Democratic Convention, and Richard Nixon's controlled use of the media—all these events (and others) destroyed previously established patterns for nominating candidates and conducting campaigns. As a consequence, a new political order came into being.

This "new order" (in Shogan's formulation) is "marked by the domination of personality and technology, the self-selection of candidates and the self-promotion of candidacies, the fragmentation of constituencies, the shifting of voter loyalties, and, most conspicuous of all, the thrust of the media to the forefront of the political scene." As nominating procedures opened up in the wake of '68 and reduced the clout of party bosses, electing the leader of the free world became a very expensive free-for-all highly dependent on news reports and paid advertisements rather than personal interaction between party workers and voters.

In brisk, lucid prose, Shogan reviews the last nine presidential campaigns, paying close attention to how the press performed in each contest. At times, *Bad News* reads like an experienced reporter's rant: informed exasperation at the superficiality, exaggeration, or mindlessness of that variegated collective known as the media. Shogan advocates "a more thoughtful type of journalism," providing "enough background to put events in context and clarify their importance."

Shogan names names and points to specific stories he thinks ill served the public. In criticizing the overly portentous coverage of the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994 and its relevance to presidential politics, he cuts to the bone: "My own paper, the *Los Angeles Times*, was quick to read profound significance into the returns from barely 40 percent of the electorate when my editors inserted into a story under my byline the claim that the GOP victory signaled 'a sharp turn from the message of activist government on which President Clinton campaigned in 1992.' How the editors knew this the story did not say, for the exit polls offered scant information to support such a sweeping judgment."

Shogan frames his argument by looking back at the 2000 campaign. Calling last year "probably the media's worst performance in presidential coverage since the emergence of the new political order four decades earlier," he maintains that George W. Bush received more positive reportage than Al Gore, noting: "The press paid far more attention to things Gore did wrong and made far too much of them."

Without taking sides (both candidates rendered here have strengths and weaknesses), Shogan examines how Bush and Gore were portrayed. According to this analytical assessment, Bush benefited from a less probing press, while Gore

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suffered from exaggerated attention to questionable traits, including his penchant for personal exaggeration. Any sense of balance or perspective got lost in the mad scramble to meet deadlines or put reports on the air. In a way, the miscues and snafus surrounding election-night coverage (broadcast, print, and Internet) brought into bold relief problems that occurred at other times during the campaign.

Seeing journalists as story-hungry yet nonpartisan enablers, "allowing the political operatives on each side to practice their deceptions and distortions," Shogan proposes that the media follow more deliberate practices in presenting candidates for national office to the public. Returning to a theme he explored in his 1999 book, *The Double-Edged Sword: How Character Makes and Ruins Presidents from Washington to Clinton* (Westview Press), Shogan says reporters should explain why character is important, and what (besides private proclivities) it means in evaluating how a public figure thinks and acts. He urges greater care and more explanatory discussion in the presentation of polls. Too often "precision journalism" provides an incomplete or skewed snapshot of public opinion that makes the survey report misleadingly imprecise. Finally, he asserts: "The press should cover the news, not predict it." The journalistic drive to be first is often so strong that real news—with nuance and context—loses out to speculation. The more pressure to publish scoops the more emphasis on conjecture. The result—literally and figuratively—is bad news.

Readers familiar with recent presidential politics and fluent in press criticism will not discover a great deal new or novel in Shogan's book. But *Bad News* clearly points fingers at specific problems in our political system and in American journalism that we, as citizens, disregard at our democratic peril. □

Robert Schmuhl *is professor of American studies and director of the John W. Gallivan Program in Journalism, Ethics & Democracy at the University of Notre Dame. He is the author, most recently, of* Indecent Liberties *(University of Notre Dame Press).*

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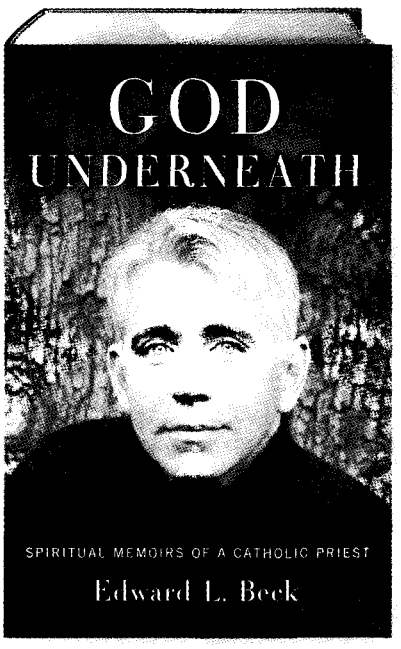

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RELIGION BOOKNOTES

Lawrence S. Cunningham

James Coriden is one of the best-known canonists in the English-speaking world. Among other things, he is one of the authors of the authoritative *The Code of Canon Law: Text and Commentary* (1985). His excellent little book, *The Parish in Catholic Tradition* (1996), I reviewed favorably in these pages. His new *Canon Law as Ministry* states its fundamental thesis early on: "Canon law is primarily a ministry of the church."

Canon Law as Ministry: Freedom and Good Order for the Church
By James A. Coriden
Paulist, $14.95, 205 pp.

While the primary audience for this work is that broad part of the church that comes into direct contact with the workings of the canons (clergy, religious, lay leaders, and students of the "sacred sciences"), it is a very useful work for those who rail against "legalism" in the church without really understanding how, in fact, law works within the Catholic community. In order to make that connection, Coriden frequently shows how certain general strands of canonical legislation touch or do not touch the life of a parish.

After some lucid opening chapters on the development of laws within the church, Coriden argues that the first task of the canons is to ensure the freedom of the Christian who lives within the church. Drawing on both the new code for the Latin rite (1983) and that for the Oriental church (1990), he provides a long list of rights that every Christian, whether clerical or lay, possesses. Such rights are not insignificant. If, for example, the canons say that every person has a fundamental right to hear the Word of God and receive the sacraments of the church, that right has a concrete bearing on the places where priests are not available to serve the people of God. I mention that right since the closing of parishes for lack of a priest involves not just prudential judgments and theological truths (the essential mark of catholicity is full celebration of the sacraments) but rights in law as well.

The second task of canon law, Coriden asserts, is to sustain "good order." By "good order" he does not mean order only from the top down. (In fact, he criticizes John Paul II for modifying two canons in 1998 without due consultation, an exercise Coriden calls a scandalous abuse of papal authority.) Rather, it is that harmonious balance that holds in creative tension the local and the universal, the individual and the common good. It is for that reason he insists that the canonist exercises a church ministry—a ministry that ramifies to everything from liturgical celebration to pastoral strategies of various kinds. The posture of seeing canon law as ministry explains why Coriden frequently reverts to the parish to explain how one or another facet of law impinges on the lives of ordinary communicants.

Coriden takes up briefly the issue of marriage tribunals, a topic which deserves a book in its own right. In a tough paragraph he calls the current procedures dealing with the validity of marriages awkward, cumbersome, and in many parts of the world, nonexistent. Without going into detail, he argues for some alternative strategies that might be used to deal with the huge problem of divorce and remarriage. The range of those strategies is such that one would only hope that the author will use his considerable knowledge of the field to advance some further considerations. The one point he does insist on is this: most people who come to a tribunal seek forgiveness and reconciliation with the church and not (as ancient Roman law thinks) their status as marriageable or nonmarriageable. Here, as elsewhere, Coriden notes the tension between the roots of the canons in Roman law and a more recent desire to highlight their connection to the imperatives of the gospel life.

This unfailingly interesting and well-written book ends with a bibliography and a usable index. One hopes that Coriden will continue to write from his learned vantage point as a canonist who also has a deep sympathy for the ordinary Catholic.

The Prayer of Saint Francis
By Leonardo Boff
Orbis, $12, 118 pp.

Fitting for someone who spent many years in the Franciscan Order, Leonardo Boff, the Brazlian theologian, has had an abiding interest in Saint Francis. His 1984 biography of the saint reflected a close acquaintance with the standard scholarship, which is vast. This current volume is a series of meditations on the famous and much anthologized "Prayer of Saint Francis" ("Lord, make me an instrument of your peace...") which, of course, is ascribed to but was not written by Saint Francis.

"We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way."

–St. Francis of Assisi

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In the introductory pages, Boff provides a reasonable explanation of who wrote the prayer and under what conditions. What he has to say about the prayer's origins is completely new to me despite my having kept out an eye for solid information about it for some time. Twenty years ago, someone traced the prayer to Germany but that, in fact, does not seem to be the case. According to Boff, a French Catholic aristocrat, the Marquis de La Rochetulon, sent Pope Benedict XV a series of prayers for peace during the early period of World War I. One of those prayers was published in *L'Osservatore Romano* in December 1916. A week later, the French Catholic newspaper *La Croix* picked up the prayer and published it. The prayer gained further currency when a French Franciscan put the text—now described as a "Prayer for Peace by Saint Francis"—on a poster for the use of Third Order Franciscans. From there, the prayer spread.

After this explanatory opening, Boff takes the individual petitions of the prayer, writes brief reflections on them, and ends each reflection with a prayer. One of the most attractive features of these meditations is Boff's sensitivity to words. He ponders, for example, the relationship between symbolic and diabolic; the embedding of the word "heart" in "concord"; the concept of "Master" when applied to Christ. Each reflection is only a few pages, but there is much to be learned from each. Alas, the bibliography at the end of the book did not receive adequate attention. Too many books are cited in the Portuguese and too many standard texts about Francis in English go unmentioned.

When Prophecy Still Had a Voice: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Robert Lax
Edited by Arthur W. Biddle
University of Kentucky, $39.95, 472 pp.

Arthur Biddle's exemplary edition of the letters exchanged between Thomas Merton and his Columbia University friend, Robert Lax, ends with a long interview with Lax, conducted on Patmos, the poet's home until ill health forced him back to the United States where he died last year.

Although parts of the correspondence have appeared in other venues, Biddle has transcribed both sides of the total exchange of letters which dates back to the late 1930s and ends with a never-received letter Lax wrote to Merton two days before the latter's death in Bangkok on December 10, 1968. Given both writers' epistolary styles and wide-ranging use of foreign phrases, transcription alone must have presented a formidable editorial task.

As the letters reveal, both Merton and Lax were shaped by the literary modernism regnant at Columbia University in the late 1930s. Both had powerful contemplative instincts, which led one to a Trappist monastery and the other, after a stint at the *New Yorker*, to a life of pilgrimage, solitude, and dedication to poetry. Merton, of course, has become a figure well known in the world while Lax, esteemed in Europe, is little known on this side of the Atlantic.

Those who read these letters will have to do so with a certain taste for word play, odd spellings, nicknames, puns, and elaborate literary constructions. These friends shared a love for the style of James Joyce and, through that love, experienced a lifelong intoxication with words. The playful names they gave each other or the way in which they would sign their letters are worth a laugh in their own right. Merton called himself "Pope Lozenge the Fifteenth" or "Homer T" or "Luther Burbank" while Lax would address Merton as "O Harry" or "Chet" or by the exclamation "Hoy" or, more simply, "Merton."

A little word play can go a long way, and reading these letters at a long stretch may daunt all but the most devoted readers of Merton. Nonetheless, if one perseveres by cutting through the linguistic underbrush there are wonderful passages from both men about the nature of prayer, their mutual interest in mystical literature, the character of art (they were close friends of the abstract expressionist painter, Ad Reinhardt), the follies of politics, both ecclesiastical and civil. In some of the early letters, Lax writes about his own conversion from Judaism to Christianity, and they both discuss how to make poetry into a prophetic vehicle. Always there is talk of poetry itself, their own and that of their vast circle of friends. Both had a taste for gnomic, abstract verse—a taste that buds forth in these letters.

Most of all, Thomas Merton and Robert Lax were friends, as the ease and joy with which they write each other testify. In reading these letters, I was reminded of the opening lines of a treatise on friendship penned centuries ago by the Cistercian monk, Aelred of Rievaulx: "I recall now two friends, who, although they have passed from this present life, nevertheless live to me and always will so live."

The Dialectical Development of Doctrine
A Methodological Proposal
by
Charles Dickinson

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If Christianity—without losing its soul—is yet to avoid losing touch with the world, it must constantly update itself by dialogue with all the intellectual currents of today. To this end, the author proposes a necessary two-way ***dialectic*** between theology and the world: an ongoing dialectic ultimately essential to both church and world.

Memories of Grace: Portraits from the Monastery
By James Stephen Behrens
Acta, $12.95, 156 pp.

Father Behrens was a diocesan priest in Newark, New Jersey, prior to his decision to enter the Trappist monastery

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in Conyers, Georgia, where he now lives and writes. I have seen his essays and sketches in various places over the years and now, in this brief little book, have had the chance to read a fuller selection of his writings. In one piece, he describes how he became a writer. While visiting his parents in Louisiana he stopped by a bookshop and purchased a pile of works by Walker Percy. The bookshop was staffed by Percy's wife, who evidently told her husband about the book-buying priest. Percy called him up and invited him for lunch, and, in the course of conversation, strongly encouraged him to write. In Percy's words, the Christian story has a "wondrous message" and that message should be written about.

The brief chapters that make up this volume are vignettes of Behrens's life outside the monastery: sketches of his family, his neighborhood, his ministry, and his life in urban America. Sometimes Behrens recalls these stories from the vantage point of the monastic cloister. He often looks behind these everyday tales to discover hidden truths in the manner of those, like Georges Bernanos's unnamed priest, who find grace everywhere.

I enjoyed reading these stories and can only hope that now Behrens will use his talents to speak from his monastic experience to us who are still in the world he remembers so well. I do not think we need monastic piety from him (enough monks supply that need) but, rather, a view of this grace-filled world from a somewhat different perspective. Behrens has a gift for vivid prose; we should look for more from him.

John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition
By D. Bruce Hindmarsh
Eerdmans, $30, 366 pp.

A few years ago Bill Moyers did a documentary for PBS on the hymn "Amazing Grace." From that program I learned that the composer was the captain of a slave ship that made the triangular voyage from England to Africa to the Caribbean. John Newton underwent a conversion experience, gave up the sea, was ordained to the Anglican priesthood, and, until his death in 1807, served parishes in the English Midlands and London.

What I discovered in Bruce Hindmarsh's learned biography was that Newton became a convert not because of his disgust for the slave trade, but because of his horror at the dissolute life he had led. Blasphemy, not slave trading, was the sin of which he accused himself. It was only decades later, mainly under the impulse of reformers like Wilberforce, that he came to some sound convictions about the dismal trafficking which had been part of his youth.

I also learned that Newton lived in the midst of theological developments so complex that Hindmarsh supplies the reader with a schema to sort out the various eddies of theological dispute. Newton had a Calvinist orientation. He was a fine Anglican parish priest, an indefatigable preacher and well-known writer, and he had connections with the Wesleyan revival of the eighteenth century. One companion in his parish at Olney was the poet-writer William Cowper who, despite intermittent fits of madness, was author and collaborator with Newton of the anthology *Olney Hymns*.

Like most Protestants of the time, Newton had very little contact with or knowledge of Catholicism although, as Hindmarsh notes, he had read a bit in the Jansenist literature coming from France. In these writings he would have found a kind of Augustinianism congenial to his own Calvinist leanings. In a series of 1772 letters, Newton developed a paradigm for how grace works that is not unlike the traditional Catholic understanding of the three stages of the spiritual life—a doctrine which has roots in the writings of Origen of Alexandria.

Many readers, not professionally concerned with theology, might find this book a bit slow where Hindmarsh disentangles the various strands of English theological work in the eighteenth century, but apart from those somewhat dense pages, his detailed study of Newton is crisply presented. I especially liked the long description of Newton's parochial life at Olney, where he labored for thirty-five years (1764–79). Newton preached twice on Sunday while finding time not only to visit his flock regularly but also to conduct regular study groups and prayer circles. He was a good parson, and I am happy to have been introduced to his life by such a reliable biographer. On my next visit to London this unreconstructed papist will pay honors to Newton's tomb at Saint Mary Woolnoth. □

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Lawrence S. Cunningham *is the John A. O'Brien Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame.*

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BLUEBERRY HILL

Katharine Byrne

We did not own a car, but I traveled each summer by Greyhound bus from our drab two-flat on the far south side of Chicago to Uncle Harry's farm in Michigan. He sent me the ticket. Since not much happened there, when the invariable "What I Did on My Vacation" assignment was announced each September, I had to invent and augment appropriate incidents. In eighth grade, my tale about involuntary stoop labor in a neighbor's blueberry patch had its own imagined details.

On hot August afternoons, I would sit on the porch with my cousin Geraldine, but we were miles apart, for she was queen of the local teen scene, four years older than I, beautiful and accomplished. While waiting for her boyfriend Malcolm, home from Hillanvale College in the next county, she would buff her perfect fingernails and brush her long blond hair. I was crying my way through four volumes of Charles Dickens. But there were other matters on my mind. As I scraped my gym shoes against the floor to keep the swing moving, I thought about the beautiful shoes I had seen in a shop in Benton Harbor.

Soft honey-colored leather pumps with rounded toes, Cuban heels, and brown grosgrain ribbon bows. In the unlikely event that I would be invited to a real party, I wanted to own these party shoes, a desire unworthy of *The Old Curiosity Shop*'s Little Nell, but I harbored it nonetheless, although the possibility of my owning them was remote.

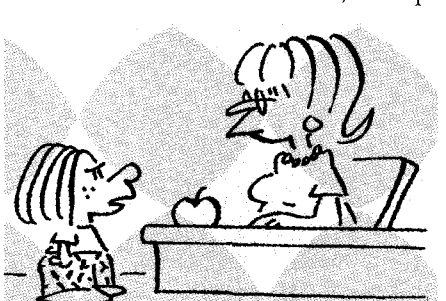
When school opened I would have a pair of sturdy brown oxfords, much like those I had last year and the year before that. "They'll take a good shine," my father would say. Who cares, I was thinking when a Studebaker half truck bounced down the washboard road and stopped in a cloud of dust near the house. Mr. Cooper, owner of the next farm and father of Geraldine's Malcolm, stuck his head inside the screen door. "Any young 'uns around here want to make a little money?" he wanted to know. "We need pickers for the blueberries, early tomorrow."

Geraldine greeted the prospect of manual labor with a musical laugh. Nor did making a little money appeal to her. She was gracious, however, to Mr. Cooper. "We would love to help you," she assured him without even asking me. At 7:30 the next day we were off to work, on a day Aunt Bessie assured us was "going to be a scorcher."

Blueberries are small. They accumulate slowly, a few at a time plopping into an aluminum bucket. My hands were soon bloody from squashed fruit as I moved slowly up and down rows of low bushes, the sun blistering the back of my neck. Most of the time Geraldine sat under a pear tree laughing at Malcolm's dumb jokes.

My fellow workers were three skinny farm boys my own age. The day was a blur of sun and backache and the small pleasure of bringing one and then another and another full bucket to Mrs. Cooper, who would add a tally to my name on a sheet of lined paper. One of the boys, a shrimpy little kid, was closer to the ground and faster than the rest of us. But I was better than the other two.

At the end of the afternoon, as I approached the old kitchen table where Mrs. Cooper sat with her list and her purse, Geraldine, who had gone for a walk with Malcolm, reappeared. "Oh, Mrs. Cooper," she trilled, "we couldn't take money. We've had fun helping you. That's what neighbors are for!"



"Since when is what I did on my summer vacation any of your business?"

Then what? Did Mrs. Cooper insist on paying me? Did Aunt Bessie hear about Geraldine's generosity at my expense and buy me the beautiful shoes? No. I accepted Geraldine's decision without protest and walked home ahead of her, tears smearing my crooked gold-wire glasses. And wore the recurring brown oxfords that autumn and winter.

But in my years of writing those "What I Did Last Summer" compositions, I had learned that nobody wants to hear about your helping Aunt Bessie feed the thrashers, or how you selected skeins of embroidery thread to outline "MOTHER" on a guest towel. That's why one year I had invented a runaway pony cart, and the next year an encounter with an unfriendly bulldog. In each of these stories I behaved heroically.

So it was that in recounting the events of my day in the blueberry patch, travail turned to triumph. In the story I wrote for Sister Mary Charles Borromeo that year, and read aloud to the class, I turned to my cousin with the appropriate retort of an outraged child, and reminded her, "You're not in charge of me, Geraldine!"

And Geraldine stood there abashed and silent as Mrs. Cooper counted out the precious wages into my hand. And gave me an extra quarter for being, as she said, "the best litttle blueberry picker in Berrien County." I bought the beautiful shoes and I am saving them for next Easter. Thus did I emerge from this episode once more the star of the show, if only on paper. □

Katharine Byrne *writes from Chicago.*

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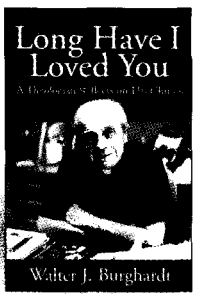

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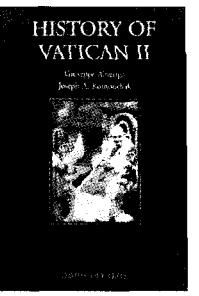

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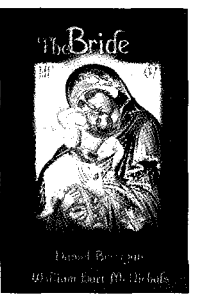

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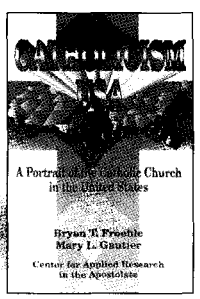
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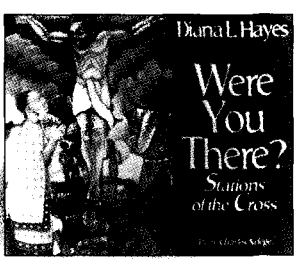

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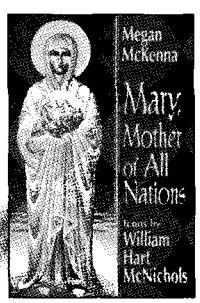

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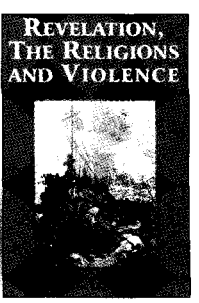

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